APOSTATE

From Christianity to Islam
in times of secularisation and terror

Joram van Klaveren

About the author

J.J. (Joram Jaron) van Klaveren MA
(Born 1979 in Amsterdam)

Education

Pre-university education - Het Baken /
Joke Smit College Amsterdam
Religious Studies - Free University
Amsterdam
Teacher training college, Religion Studies
- Free University Amsterdam

Political activities

Member of the City Council of Almere
(People's Party for Freedom &
Democracy)
Member of the Provincial Council (group
chairman, Party for Freedom)
Policy officer for Social Affairs &
Employment and Education, Culture
& Science (Party for Freedom)
Member of Parliament (Party for
Freedom, spokesperson on Islam and
integration, amongst others)
Member of Parliament (Group Bontes/
Van Klaveren, later For Netherlands)

Non-political activities

Commentator Evangelical Broadcasting
(Radio 1, Dutch Public Broadcaster)
and BNR Newsradio
Board member of Adam Smith Institute
(economic agency)
President Anthony Janszoon Association
Teacher of religion - several high schools

"They condemn what they do not understand"

Cicero

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In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Benevolent

"Is God Dead?" On April 8, 1966, that question graced the cover of the influential *Time* magazine, in large red letters on a stark black background. The question itself was a reference to the famous statement made by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century that "God is dead." Both the philosopher's assertion and the magazine's question were received well by the secular-minded and the atheists, but deeply disturbed the devoted theists. The reality of it, however, is that not only is God *not* dead, but God is alive and loved and worshipped worldwide by countless believers, whether they be Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Christians, Jews, or Muslims. Faith, in some form of the sacred, is as strong as it has ever been in human history. Many of us may not think about our own faith, but the fact that we make plans for tomorrow or start families or plant trees are all acts of faith—and acts of hope. And when the world is at its best, we can add charity to faith and hope, and revel in that triad of great theological virtues.

Joram van Klaveren, whether he knew it or not, was a virtuous truth seeker. But some years ago, he had such immense animosity towards the religion of Islam that he actually made a political career out of fighting the spread of Islam in his country, and preached about its dangers as if it were a cancer on the European body that had to be excised. After leaving politics, he devoted his time to writing a book proclaiming the evils of Islam. Being a sincere soul, he delved into the study of Islam, the better to preach against it. But that was not to be. People make plans, but as the Quran says, God is the Best of Planners.

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"Is God Dead?" On April 8, 1966, that question graced the cover of the influential *Time* magazine, in large red letters on a stark black background. The question itself was a reference to the famous statement made by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century that "God is dead." Both the philosopher's assertion and the magazine's question were received well by the secular-minded and the atheists, but deeply disturbed the devoted theists. The reality of it, however, is that not only is God *not* dead, but God is alive and loved and worshipped worldwide by countless believers, whether they be Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Christians, Jews, or Muslims. Faith, in some form of the sacred, is as strong as it has ever been in human history. Many of us may not think about our own faith, but the fact that we make plans for tomorrow or start families or plant trees are all acts of faith—and acts of hope. And when the world is at its best, we can add charity to faith and hope, and revel in that triad of great theological virtues.

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All of us have physical blind spots that prevent us from actually seeing a certain area in our visual field. But we also have mental blind spots that we tend not to think about and that often prevent us from seeing things that are in plain sight. Joram's sincerity enabled him to shift his perspective, to remove the blind spot, to look at something objectively, and to really try and understand it on its own terms. This led to an extraordinary search, the result of which is the book that you are now reading. This book tells the story of an uncommon trajectory, the journey of a man from animosity to charity, from despair to hope, and from belligerence to peace.

Joram examined the concept of God in Islam, something that struck him as utterly extraordinary because of all the negative things that he'd been taught about Islam. He learned that Muslims, like Jews, believe that God's oneness is absolute, and that the idea of a triune God is profoundly alien to both the Jewish and Muslim traditions. Among the Abrahamic faiths, the Muslims have the most radical monotheism of God; the complete and utter oneness and uniqueness of the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Sustainer of all things animate and inanimate. The creed of the Muslims is a very simple creed, as Joram explains—the idea that there is nothing worthy of worship except the one true living God, and that God, through Divine Benevolence, spoke to humanity through the voices of the Prophets.

While many Christians marvel at the inability of the Jews to see Jesus as a Prophet (and in *their* understanding also as the incarnate Logos), many Muslims are struck by the inability of the Jews and Christians to see the extraordinary similarity between the Prophet Muhammad and Moses. God said that He would raise a Prophet like unto Moses: Moses was a lawgiver and led his people in the great exodus out of Egypt to the promised land. The Prophet Muhammad was a lawgiver who led his

people from Mecca to Medina. The great Jewish rabbis of the Middle Ages actually believed that Prophet Muhammad was a providential force working towards the great enlightenment of humanity that comes at the end of time and that his teachings would help multitudes understand the Seven Noahide Laws that Jews consider to be binding upon all peoples. These Noahide Laws can be found in the Decalogue. The most important one is to worship none other than the one true God, and this is what the Prophet Muhammad taught.

Joram then examined what he, and many other Westerners, saw as the controversial beliefs inherent to Islam: misogyny, terrorism, antisemitism, and so on. But what he found instead was far from these things. He found a religion that he felt was an enlightened testimony to the truths of religion and also one that helped him to resolve some of his own difficulties about God.

Joram likens his transformation to that of Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament, who fought Christianity as a devout Jew, but miraculously became Paul on the road to Damascus, embracing Christ and becoming the greatest defender of the Christian faith. Joram's conversion, however, in my estimation, is more akin to that of the second caliph, 'Umar bin al-Khattab, who had immense animosity towards the Prophet Muhammad and actually set out to kill him but was then told he should look to his own sister who had embraced Islam. He was so distraught that he went to his sister's house and, for the first time, actually listened to the Quran. Struck by the power of its message, he went to the Prophet and soon converted to Islam.

Joram's story also follows a long chain of enlightened and sincere Westerners who may not have embraced Islam but who, through their own study, came to understand that Islam was one of the great religious traditions of humanity that provided an immense amount of solace to

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Joram's story also follows a long chain of enlightened and sincere Westerners who may not have embraced Islam but who, through their own study, came to understand that Islam was one of the great religious traditions of humanity that provided an immense amount of solace to

its adherents and engendered true benevolence and charity in them towards their fellow human beings. This chain includes the great German poet Goethe who said, "If Islam is submission to God, then all of us live and die in Islam." And it includes John Locke who studied with the great Arabist Edward Pococke at Oxford and was struck by the record of tolerance that Islam had towards other religions. Also in the long chain are people like the nineteenth-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle who, in his book 'On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History', portrayed the Prophet Muhammad as his hero, which was immensely offensive to many Victorian English men and women at the time.

More recent examples of this tradition are the American historian Juan Cole, who wrote a book 'Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires', and the Pulitzer Prize winning author Garry Wills, who, late in his life, decided to study the Quran for a year and wrote an extraordinary book 'What the Qur'an Meant: And Why it Matters' as a corrective to many of the common misconceptions and distortions of Islam. Joram's story differs from this chain of Westerners studying Islam in one aspect: unlike them, he chose to embrace the religion.

But whether or not readers choose to convert to Islam is not as important for a more irenic world as their ability to recognize the beauty of Islam and to marvel at one man's journey from hate to love and from prejudice to acceptance of that beauty. It's also the journey of a man in search of God in an age when atheism is on the rise and the so-called silence of God has left people in despair. For believers, there is no silence of God, as God is alive and active within our world and continues to speak through His creation; many people have simply lost the ability to listen. This book is an exploration of that idea and the classical arguments for the existence of God, especially in a time when the popular notion is that faith and reason are incompatible. This book argues that there are reasons to believe and they're not simply reasons of the heart: they're also reasons of the intellect. These reasons, of both the heart and the intellect, led Joram van Klaveren from wanting to write a screed about Islam to writing about the creed of Islam.

Hamza Yusuf Hanson

29 October 2019

Foreword by Professor Abdal Hakim Murad

Ours is an age of information, and an age of misunderstanding. Human beings, already well-designed to understand each other, should be closer to one another today than at any time in history. Technology has annihilated distance, computers can translate texts, we live beside neighbours from other communities whom we can ask about their beliefs. And yet nations are drawing apart from one another, provinces are seeking independence, and religions seem to be giving way to their xenophobic and fundamentalist fringes.

In such times as these we urgently need to hear voices which rise above the chaos of mutual recrimination, voices which are suspicious not of other human beings but of attempts to typecast them negatively. We need to give each other a balanced and fair hearing, to use the best resources of scholarship and objective reason to look beyond popular and fearful stereotypes, to see the human reality and moral richness of other cultures. We need to have the inner strength to value the diversity of the human species and to reject the impulses within ourselves that seek out faults and refuse to consider alternative narratives.

The present book is a hopeful sign that the present global mood of miserable suspiciousness and blame can be overcome, and that there are real grounds for optimism. To admit that one has been wrong is seldom easy, but to write in careful detail about one's error, and then to document one's painful road to truth, reveals considerable strength of character, and restores one's confidence in human nature and in the prospects for change. The author has not only given careful and unprejudiced attention to the key arguments which underpin anti-Muslim bigotry, but has documented his own interior journey in rather moving terms. His pilgrimage shows him engaging with some of

the most recent contemporary issues, set in the context of our unprecedentedly strange new world, but there is something timeless about it also. It is a journey from shadows into light.

That Light is from heaven, and we recall the Hadith which tells us that "the heart of the human being is between two fingers of the All-Merciful God; Who turns it around as He wills." The author has felt those fingers, which alone bring about conversion. May he be blessed in his struggle to spread reconciliation and trust between communities, in the most authentic tradition of Muslim mercy and compassion. As another hadith commands: "Those who show mercy shall receive mercy from the One Who is Merciful. Be merciful to those who dwell on earth, and He Who is in heaven shall be merciful towards you."

Our times do not only need better economics, politics, and strategies for social cohesion; they need humanity to rediscover mercy, trust, and the enjoyment of human difference. Joram's book points the way towards the larger moral transformation which we all urgently need.

Abdal Hakim Murad

24 October 2019

Preface

"…will you then not use your reason?"

Quran 21:10

Reason, rationality, or the mind. These terms often express that which is not based on emotions. At the same time, many people are not much inclined to associate them with 'religion'. Now, I certainly would not say that there have not been any emotions involved in my quest to find God; however, it was primarily an intellectual exercise. Researching source-material, seeking to understand what had previously seemed incomprehensible, and analysing matters that, on a superficial level, seem to be predominantly emotional, were my starting points during this quest.

Mohamed Ben Hammouch (from 't Kennishuys) has played a particularly important, facilitating role in my research. Whenever possible, he would answer my questions, introduce me to others and make suggestions that were beneficial to this book and to my story. I would therefore like to thank him for his knowledge, competence, support and energy, and for the open-minded way he received me after my first email to him.

I would also like to thank Imam Mhamed Aarab and Imam Azzedine Karrat for their help, their tremendous insight, their vision and their time. Without their input, a number of valuable additions to this book would not have been possible.

My thanks also goes to Shaykh Hamza Yusuf who, with his vast knowledge of Islam, his talent for making difficult material understandable for the layman and the way in which he builds and

shows bridges between Islam and, among others, the West, is a true inspiration for the undersigned. His willingness to write a foreword was an absolute honour for me.

Likewise, Professor Abdal Hakim Murad cannot remain without a mention. With his prodigious knowledge in the field of Islamic Studies, and his personal feedback on countless theological matters, he has shown me the value of a classical approach to religion. His answers facilitated my first steps on a new path. The fact that he was also willing to write some personal words about my journey is more than a blessing.

In addition, I hope this book may be of some lasting benefit to those who are searching for God.

Joram van Klaveren

Almere, the Netherlands, October 2019

1. Introduction

The work at hand is the unforeseen result of an initiative that was originally supposed to be a critique of Islam. However, as I was writing, researching and analysing, a new paradigm slowly imposed itself. The frameworks underlying my view of Islam, as they had developed over the previous twelve years, were less fundamental than I had presumed.

A number of factors have been crucial to the development of this framework and how I, during my college years and onwards, began to view and qualify Islam. First of all, the timing was remarkable. I began to pursue a degree in Religious Studies on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. A horrendous and cardinal moment in contemporary history and uniquely defining for anything related to the topic of Islam in the years to come. The attacks on the Madrid train station, at the school in Beslan, the murder of Theo van Gogh and the bomb explosions in the London subway also took place during my time as a student. It was a disturbing and extraordinary period to be pursuing Religious Studies.

Many more atrocities were to follow, both within Europe and outside of it. From kidnappings, anti-Semitic terror attacks and decapitations, to random stabbings, attacks with trucks, the proclamation of the caliphate by ISIS and suicide bombings. There was even a large group of Muslims from the Netherlands who volunteered as jihadists in Syria. This persistent and intensifying battle of the extremes played an unmistakable part in the development of my vision of Islam.

Besides this barbaric terrorist violence, I also saw during my college years (and unfortunately this is still the case today) how politicians, opinion-makers and artists were facing death threats. Moreover, the statistics regarding honour killings, female circumcision and forced marriages—in which people with an Islamic background are

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overrepresented—were not a reason to be optimistic about the development of Islam in the Netherlands (or more generally in the West).

Another essential aspect that has been influential for a long period of time in the totality of my perception of Islam is the so-called 'whitewashing'. Terror and violence in the name of Islam has been, and is still being, structurally disconnected from Islam and consequentially downplayed by a number of opinion-makers and government officials. This is not only incorrect, for many of those who are concerned about the influence of radical Islam, it also causes the uncomfortable feeling that the establishment either does not see this relationship, or, for the sake of political correctness, does not want to see it. This refusal by a part of the Dutch government to acknowledge what is clearly taking place leads to a discrepancy between observable reality—in which Islamic terrorists use certain religious texts to legitimise their deeds—and (national) authorities and parts of the established media, who deny this legitimisation or do not even mention it to begin with. It is this denial and lack of mentioning that I call 'whitewashing'. It entails presenting and interpreting raw reality in a bland and opaque fashion in comparison to how it truly manifests itself.

Driven by the concerns mentioned above, I was led to the understanding and interpretation of those who did *not* shy away from discussing the darker side of things. For example, the friendly, erudite and now deceased Professor Hans Jansen, and the American Professor Bernard Lewis, as well as organisations that have been critical of Islam, like the Edmund Burke Foundation and later on even the Party for Freedom. Moreover, this 'whitewashing', along with generalisation and exaggeration by the other side, complicates any sincere content-based discussion.

Another bump in the road relates to the castigating of critics who *do* identify the relationship between radical Islam and terrorism. This group is frequently silenced with today's smear word: Islamophobia. Even though nonsensical criticism of Islam does exist, along with many critics who are greatly lacking in knowledge of the topic, the fact that discrimination certainly occurs and that the intentional spreading of false notions takes place, the legitimisation of terroristic violence based on Islamic sources should absolutely not be ignored. It would also be unnecessary to do so. Although there may exist what I call a 'theological cramp'—a result of our understanding of the separation of church and state, continuous secularisation and political correctness—in the West, in the Islamic world the dangers related to an uprooted exegesis of Islamic sources have frequently been discussed. A clear example of this is the public denunciation of extremism, and the struggle for freedom, by Indonesian scholar Yahya Cholil Staquf, secretary-general of the largest independent Islamic organisation in the world (Nahdatul Ulama). This is certainly also the case for the work of an authority such as Al-Yaqoubi, who firmly refutes ISIS' theological justifications in his book 'Refuting ISIS' (the Dutch translation of which was published by 't Kennishuys in 2017).

This brings me to the last two points that have certainly influenced my qualification of Islam: the limited Islamic intellectual framework in the Netherlands, and the enormous amount of Wahhabi propaganda emanating from the Gulf States. Since the 1960s, in Saudi Arabia alone nearly €60 billion has been spent on the worldwide exporting of a radical interpretation of Islam (The Henry Jackson Society, 2017). Organisations from Qatar, the UAE and Kuwait have also spent enormous amounts of money promoting this radical variant of the

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faith. This variant contains a message that is often anti-Western, anti-Semitic, misogynistic and not aimed at the promotion of freedom; and it is spreading fast. Recently, it turned out that Kuwait is spending millions on the financing of certain mosques in the Netherlands, while in Amsterdam extremist committees manage nearly half of all Moroccan mosques. The influence and pressure on moderate mosques and believers is thus increasing, even more so as certain Salafis do not shy away from violence (even internally), as mentioned by the AIVD (Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service) in its yearly report (2016).

The government's very passive attitude with regard to battling this extremist (foreign-funded) doctrine also plays a role. Due to this attitude, the views of this loud minority of extremists have become and continue to be increasingly dominant within the Islamic community. Since there are few traditional Islamic scholars that are active in the Netherlands, the theological voice for a counterbalance (against extremists within the faith) is only sporadically heard. Intellectual polemics are therefore nearly non-existent. The information a seeking outsider and student, such as myself at the time, subsequently receives will therefore be, more often than not, from a radical Saudi origin. In this way, my perception of Islam as a religion of violence and exclusion was confirmed and deepened by the community's own explanation.

Despite the five factors mentioned above, which had largely shaped my view of Islam, I still remained fascinated by the attractive aspects of the religion, such as its commitment to prayer, its calligraphic art, its reverence for what is sacred *and* by Islamic architecture. This opened the door to the continuation of my studies and eventually to the reassessment of my views.

The development mentioned above, ironically enough, largely occurred during the beginning stages of the (earlier mentioned) idea to write a critique of Islam. Getting in touch with, amongst others, Abdal Hakim Murad, a professor of Islamic Studies at Cambridge University, as well as a further analysis of the biography of Muhammad (by Martin Lings, 'Muhammad, His Life Based on the Earliest Sources'), restudying works that had previously influenced me and perusing many new sources, gradually showed me a different point of view than the view I had been developing for the past twelve years. This process influenced the beginning stages of the book such that its starting point largely became a personal quest to find God. This development process was obviously a personal process, even more so because it concerned a view of religion. My continental reformed Protestant upbringing, and that denomination's traditional view of other religions, functioned as a foundation for my later perception of Islam. A reflection on this foundation is therefore essential.

My personal questions regarding Christian teachings on the path of my eventual, yet unexpected, re-evaluation of traditional Islamic theology have to be mentioned as well. After all, this work has become a reflection of my theological search for God, which I have been occupied with for quite some time, but which has been intensified considerably since the summer of 2014.

Finally, I would like to mention here explicitly that the topics of discussion are merely some of the many topics with regard to Islam. My intention was by no means for this work to be a comprehensive academic study, or a theoretical and abstract exercise in the fundamentals of Islam. The choice for the topics at hand was based upon those matters that have been predominant in, and reflective of, my personal religious journey towards the Ultimate Reality.

Lastly, at the start of each chapter, I have attempted to include my personal experience during different moments in time, as well as the theological approach of the quest (which, considering my content-based objections to Islam, has the upper hand in this book). I have done so by using anecdotes. In this way, I hope to do justice to the various components of my quest.

"Secularisation is certainly not a universal fact. It is actually a deviation from the worldwide tendency towards a growing religiosity in societies. The West is unique in this sense. Whether this is a positive or negative development, time will tell... I fear it is the latter. Different to what you and your progressive atheist friends think, society might very well completely fragmentise because of this. After all, mankind is irredeemably religious, but is now losing its traditional understanding."

Excerpt from an email sent by a friend and fellow student at the time (2003)

2. "God is dead"

"God is dead."

F. Nietzsche

"God is dead," Nietzsche wrote in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882). With the release of his *Also sprach Zarathustra* a couple of years later, this became a widespread statement, which more than any other statement, expressed the advanced secularisation of the West. This is an ever-ongoing process. If in the 1900s 98% of the Dutch population felt a connection with a particular church community (CBS, 2010), in 2015 only 30% associates with a church and as many as 82% no longer or hardly ever go to church. By now, outspoken atheists form a larger group than outspoken theists (God in the Netherlands, 2016). Researchers involved in this study even speak of marginalisation and a receding of Christianity. One of its conclusions is that "the Netherlands is no longer a Christian nation." In October 2018, the CBS also established that the majority of Dutch people, for the first time in history, no longer consider themselves part of any religious group. In 2018, the Pew Research Centre published a study in which it seems to be the case that the Netherlands is now the most 'nonbelieving' country of Western Europe. Nearly half of the Dutch population calls itself atheist, agnostic or irreligious.

This process has obviously made an enormous impact upon our culture and our society in general. Many aspects of life that have slowly removed themselves from the historically increased role of Christianity were now given the opportunity to develop and became 'autonomous'. Think of literature, film, music, education, journalism and the process of democratisation, emancipation and individualisation, the role of the state, drugs, sex, politics and marriage. The binding element between all

these areas has been eroded (and continues to erode). This sometimes leads (without being aware of it) to confusion, to the existential question of who we are as a society, to contemporary 'identity-politics' (imported from the U.S. by progressives) of all sorts of groups, and most fundamentally to the postmodern relativism of the Truth, the underlying story of Culture (with a capital C). The result is a unique yet uncertain experiment in human history: the organic development of a civilisation without God. That many are worried about this development is evident in the desire of various political parties to safeguard the oft-mentioned 'Judeo-Christian culture'. It is remarkable how this wish is often expressed by politicians who themselves are not religious at all. This shows that they do not realise where the core of the problem lies: a merely cultural expression of religion is void of meaning. It does not fundamentally encourage people in their behaviour, views or way of life. A firmly established living faith, on the other hand, shapes mankind and with it society in all of its aspects.

The fundamentals of Western liberty, democracy and modern human rights were developed in an era in which Christianity was still predominantly and vitally present. With the disappearing of the confessional practice of Christianity, the fruits of this way of life have naturally been affected as well. Merely propping up the walls of this Judeo-Christian building, without fixing its foundation, is the same as decorating a shopping window while the store remains otherwise empty. It is a façade that cannot last. The 'de-churching' continues (literally as well: as many as 1,000 churches will be closed by 2030) and people (still) seem not to realise what this will mean in its entirety. Besides the many sociological explanations for secularisation (Weber, Berger) and the economic and technological causes that have (rightly or wrongly) been pointed out, this process can clearly not take place without the loss of faith in the main tenets of the Church; not only by the proverbial flock, but also, or perhaps most of all, by its shepherds. The relativizing of Christian dogmas within the last mentioned group has increased dramatically. One in six ministers now doubts the existence of God (Stoffels, 2006), and there are ministers who do not believe that Jesus has ever lived and who deny the resurrection, and even the preaching of an atheist minister has now become a reality of today's Christianity. Is God, therefore, in the words of Nietzsche, dead indeed? At any rate, a large part of Christianity (in the Netherlands) is no longer committed to its classical, central message of salvation, but seems to base itself primarily on social cohesion (Durkheim) and general humanism.

However, doubt within religious traditions is not that extraordinary. In fact, it keeps faith alive and helps it persist in the dynamics of existence. Completely rejecting central tenets, on the other hand, is of an entirely different order and decisive for the continued existence of the individual as a follower of a particular religion and, collectively speaking, for the continuity of the religion itself.

This process of (gradually) distancing from Christian dogmas is a process that I have experienced within my direct surroundings, but also within myself. I remain very sympathetic to Christianity and admire it to a great extent—its culture as well as its history—and absolutely realise the importance of its persistence. However, since the latter days of my youth I have been increasingly less able to identify with essential fundamentals (upon which the orthodox worldview is based), such as the triune God, hypostatic union, Original Sin and the principal necessity of a blood sacrifice. Throughout the years, my ideas about God have changed, fundamentally even. However, God did not die and atheism did not suddenly become a rationally satisfactory alternative, quite the contrary.

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While in some circles atheism is being presented—by Richard Dawkins amongst others—as wholly factual, it does not constitute more than one of the many 'isms'. It is a faith. American scholar and historian Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah speaks of a horizontal universe in this regard (lecture at Zaytuna College, 2018). Within this worldview, matters are explained by simply comparing them to other matters that appear to be similar to the object of research. In such a reality, there is no purpose and there are no absolutes. Everything is subjective and there exists no absolute Truth. The secular domain, atheism, presumes such a horizontal universe. Within it, any metaphysical expression is irrelevant, absurd even. However, a logically sound reason for the categorical exclusion of an ultimate reality, God, is lacking. Dr. Abd-Allah places the vertical universe as being opposite to that. Within this framework one also looks 'upwards' to the philosophical principles and fundamental points of departure ('first principles') such as the principle of causality, the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle. By inserting the vertical aspect, a proverbial tent arises, a building structure with a benchmark and a definitive reality.

Human perception of reality, by way of previously mentioned 'first principles', points to that one Reality. The categorical rejection of God does not hold empirically either and rests completely on conviction and perhaps even wishful thinking. That God does *not* exist can evidently not be proven. Epistemologically speaking, one can at most supposed to be agnostic. Moreover, there are strong arguments that point towards the existence of God (see chapter 4). In my quest, God remained central as an ontological explanation. This became my new point of departure.

*"How do you know that the stars, the sun and the earth
all came into existence without a cause? My grandfather says
that what you say is incorrect."*

**My response to a claim made by a teacher at the
Montessori school (1989)**

3. Classical arguments for the existence of God

"That I do not believe in God, I cannot deny.
That my whole being cries out for God, I cannot forget."

J. P. Sartre

Throughout history, mankind has wondered to what extent, rationally speaking, beyond subjective transcendent experiences and feelings, there are any indications or proofs for the existence of God. Like for many others, this question appeared in my mind as well. From a relatively young age, there was a persistent interest and curiosity regarding the meaning of life and the answers given by the various religious traditions. It was one of the reasons, against the expectations in my surroundings (my mother wondered why I could not just choose law or economics), why I ended up at the faculty of religious studies at the VU. The presence of a broad palate of religious traditions and various aspects of Christian doctrine with—in my view—an undefined character, lead me—for as far as any doubt still remained—to choose the broader religious studies and not the more specific theology.

Different traditions have different views and paths that lead to the *Truth*. These paths may be found in experience, but a certain rational approach is not unheard of in nearly all of these traditions. Especially within monotheistic religions, there has been (and continues to be) a need to answer the fundamental question of God in a rational manner. Great (classical) thinkers in this regard, to name only a few, are of course Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, Maimonides, al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd. However, there are also contemporary thinkers that can be mentioned such as Al-Yaqoubi, William Craig, Abdal Hakim Murad, Alvin Plantinga and Hamza Yusuf.

Even though our secular culture is less concerned about God, while at the same time theological knowledge has become a scarcity, this does not decrease the rational plausibility of the existence of a Creator. It is also remarkable that contemporary denial of the existence of God very often does not seem to be based on research. Few have studied the works of the previously mentioned scholars, for example, and many are not familiar with these thinkers and their works to begin with. Nevertheless, believers are often reproached with the assertion that religion is something 'easy', that faith in God is irrational and that people only believe in order to avoid thinking for themselves.

Ironically, it seems to be those who categorically deny the existence of God that often do not think about the fundamentals of their own perception. Why do they reject the idea of there being a God? Which arguments do they bring forward? Is there any truth to the often-heard sentiment that they do not accept anything for which they have not seen definitive proof ('seeing is believing')?

This last point is quite doubtful as Shaykh Hamza Yusuf pointed out as well last year [at the Templeton Prize Ceremony, 2017]:

> These same people, however, will believe in things like quarks and neutrinos, they will believe in dark matter and they do not know the science that substantiates belief in those things, they simply trust the scientists that believe in such phenomena that we cannot see. We have theologians, also, that have their arguments for believing in the things that they cannot see. Just like most people believe in scientists without really knowing their proofs, many believers, simple people, believe what their teachers and their philosophers tell them without having proof.

So we forget that the age of science is also an age of faith, just like the age of faith was actually also an age of science. Something that we forget is that the epistemology of trust is foundational in our world.

Throughout times, various arguments for the existence of God have been formulated, pointing to a creative, metaphysical truth. Three such arguments have always fascinated me and helped form my thoughts: the cosmological, teleological, and, most of all, the moral argument for the existence of God.

The cosmological argument

Considering that change or movement exists in the universe, and that the principle of causality is a fact within our reality, the universe must also have a causal point of beginning. Aristotle's philosophy of this 'Unmoved Mover' has been the logical starting point for centuries. Thomas Aquinas (in his *Summa Theologiae*) also observes that nothing within our perceptible reality moves on its own, and therefore our reality *must* have a first external mover. This 'mover' is the Divine beginning. This idea is theoretically consistent because monotheism considers God eternal and unchangeable.

Philosophically speaking, much is (and remains) to be said in favour of God being this Unmoved Mover. In the logical and frequently asked question of where God—being the First Cause—then comes from, lies an assumption that does not correspond with the monotheistic premise that God is (also) existent beyond time, space and matter. If He, according to this religious starting point, were under the influence of time, space and matter, he would not be God (after all, He is "that of which anything greater cannot be conceived," see also chapter 5).

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Time, space and matter are also called a continuum, or a continuous whole. All these quantifiable entities (time, space and matter) must have come into existence at the same moment (Hawking, 2018). If matter exists while space does not exist, *where* would it then exist? Furthermore, if matter and space exist, but time does not exist, *when* do they exist? Time, matter and space cannot be independent of each other. Therefore, as has been stated, it is necessary that they have come into existence simultaneously. The Divine entity that brought the whole into existence in, for us, a particular moment ('time', after all, does not exist as an objective entity according to Hawking), has to be external to that. After all, God is not limited by time (not in the nineteenth century definition of it, but not in that of the twenty-first century either).

The *Kalam*-argument is a variation of the cosmological argument for the existence of God. *Kalam* is an Arabic term for 'speech'. Ibn Rushd (better known in the West as Averroes) and al-Ghazali are the best-known (Islamic) historical proponents of this argument. Today, the Christian philosopher William Lane Craig also puts it forward. The *Kalam*-argument is formulated as follows:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The mentioned cause of the universe could be *either* a subject (a consciousness) *or* an object (a thing). Because purely material entities (objects or things) are not conscious and are (essentially) inactive in a causal sense, they cannot cause anything. This makes it plausible for an immaterial subject (personal, active and with a will) to have caused the universe to exist. Within this framework, this personal will is called God (without any further specifications).

Moreover, one can also point to 'the first law of thermodynamics' in this regard. This law (popularly) states that energy never ceases to exist and cannot come into existence out of nothing. If we follow the naturalist idea that there has been a period in which nothing existed (point 0), then we have a major problem with the aforementioned law of nature. After all, there exists a universe full of energy and activity. The existence of the eternal energetic entity, God, however, is completely in agreement with this.

The teleological argument

The teleological argument for the existence of God (the Greek term *'telos'* means 'purpose' and *'logos'* means 'reason' or 'thought') presupposes that the universe contains a certain purposefulness or design. This naturally supposes the existence of a Designer. The existence of a certain order, the so-called 'fine tuning' of the universe, is displayed in recurring phenomena. Consider only the orbit of the planets around the sun, the cycle of water vapour, or the functioning of gravity and electromagnetism. The examples are numerous and very striking. So striking that even an outspoken atheist like Stephen Hawking said that this was "remarkable" and spoke about precision, even using the term "finely adjusted" (Hawking, 1988):

> The laws of science, as we know them at present, contain many fundamental numbers… The remarkable fact is that the values of these numbers seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life.

The British atheist philosopher Anthony Flew similarly observed 'design' and he even became convinced of the theological argument a couple of years before passing away. The findings in the ever-ongoing

research into DNA and the current state of affairs within microbiology were a reason for Flew to revise his views regarding the existence of God. According to him, the cell was such an irreducible complexity that the first form of life could never have been the result of a spontaneous process emanating from non-life (abiogenesis).

In this regard, the biological principle of biogenesis also needs to be mentioned: *"omne vivum ex vivo"* or: "all life emerges from other life." The common naturalist theory (which denies the existence of a creative entity) that 'in the beginning' life emerged out of non-life (the previously mentioned idea of abiogenesis) is diametrically opposed to this law of biology. In this regard, Flew also points to the 'anthropic principle': the attributes (and very precise proportions) of the universe seem to be aligned with life itself, particularly with that of mankind (Flew, 2007).

Where I point to the first law of thermodynamics with regard to the cosmological argument for the existence of God, here—with regard to the teleological argument for the existence of God—I would like to point to the second law of thermodynamics. This second law is also called 'entropy' and presumes that every system without a sustainer falls into chaos. However, no chaos exists. Instead, there exists a certain order of law. These laws of physics seem to be completely in line with the idea of an external sustainer and initiator of the universe as a system.

The moral argument

The final indication with regard to the existence of a God—generally speaking—is morality. A reality without God also means a morality without an ultimate (holy) foundation. Who then decides what is good and what is evil? After all, everything is relative. Dostoyevsky posed the question of such a godless foundation of morality: "If there is no God and no life beyond the grave, does that not mean that men will be allowed to do whatever they want?" (Dostoyevsky, 1880). That religious as well as non-religious people have a moral system and are able to distinguish between good and evil is explicitly *not* the question. This much is evident. What matters to me is the foundation. For the secular person, this topic on the origin and benchmark of morality is problematic.

From the naturalist point of view that God does not exist and that mankind is merely an evolved animal, it remains challenging to explain why no *rights* are considered to be violated when a lion devours a young zebra, or when an anteater wipes out half a colony of termites. At the same time, these rights *are* considered to be violated in the case of child soldiers, or when the weak suffer under the wickedness of a dominant group. Rights, justice and morality seem to be particular to human nature. Animals also show social behaviour, but it resembles nothing of morality in the sense of a 'set of norms and values with regard to good and evil'. Reflecting upon what is good and what is evil is not merely a certain type of behaviour, it is what defines morality. Where does this morality then come from?

Naturally, this question arose frequently during my college years. At the time, a common explanation from a secular point of view was (unsurprisingly) of a naturalist kind. Altruistic and unselfish genes would bring evolutionary advantages because self-sacrificing behaviour (*for the sake* of the group) would increase the chances of the survival (*of this group*). However, complete egoism, violence and hostility towards people outside of the group is, from the perspective of the 'survival of the fittest' principle for the sake of the survival of one's own group, similarly a moral and worthy cause.

As Professor Tim Keller stated in 'The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism', there are also people who help complete strangers and even jeopardise their own lives doing so (such as jumping to the rescue of someone who is drowning).

Such people would have been less likely to survive and pass on their genes. On the basis of strict evolutionary naturalism (the belief that everything about us is here because of a process of natural selection) that kind of altruism should have died out of the human race long ago. Instead, it is stronger than ever.

He also states that the argument that altruists throughout history indirectly had advantages (in terms of reproduction) because of their (publicly) selfless behaviour towards others does not explain why there are also people who act selflessly *without* anyone else being aware of it. Possible advantages (the appearance of attractiveness due to 'being considerate and caring') vanish because of this.

Finally, the idea that self-sacrificing behaviour is beneficial for the entire group or society by which society as a whole is able to pass on its genetic code: natural selection does not apply to society in its entirety (Williams, 1996 and Collins, 2006) and because of this the theory does not hold. The origin of our moral sense is therefore not satisfactorily explained through naturalism. Then there remains our 'inherent' normative framework, the earlier mentioned benchmark of morality. In our postmodernist society, we have stipulated that moral values depend on individual opinions and culture. Nevertheless, certain things remain of which we, by definition, disapprove. This is the case for even the greatest cultural relativist. The conservative thinker Leo Strauss put it this way: "Cannibalism is not a matter of taste." In practice, there are certain things that we simply disapprove of no matter what. Whether these things are part of someone's culture or not, whether there is self-interest involved, or whether it concerns personal views or societal habits. How then and on what grounds can we condemn, for example, cannibalism, genocide or infanticide?

After all, moral views are relative. Isaiah Berlin, one of the most prominent political and moral philosophers of the twentieth century, was of the opinion that human rights ought to be respected, most deeply and principally, because of the fact that they are human rights. This was and remained to be what eventually underpinned his thoughts on morality and those of many modern and secular thinkers along with him. There could be no mention of any metaphysical foundation. However, rejecting a metaphysical standard for morality leaves any moral claim to be nothing more than a (temporary) opinion, a subjective view of good and evil. Why should your view that genocide is immoral, for example, be any more relevant than the opposite view of someone else?

If there is no God, there is no external, eternal, moral criterion by which to judge mankind's conducts. If God does exist, then there is an answer to the previously raised question regarding the origin of morality as well as the question regarding its benchmark. It is an answer that does justice to our human experiences and reasoning, our 'built in' sense of good and evil, and one that offers a foundation beyond a mere (enduring and sometimes collective) opinion.

*"When you pray, do you speak to God the Father, Jesus
or the Holy Spirit? If Jesus is God, why then did he pray the
'Lord's Prayer'? And if Jesus is the same as God and he
returns to earth, will God then temporarily not be in
heaven?"*

Questions I asked as a teenager regarding the being of
God

4. The concept of God in Christianity

Jesus: "But who say ye that I am?"

In the previous chapter, I attempted to explain in a concise manner
that rational arguments can be found for the plausibility of the
existence of God. The logical follow-up question is then: "Which God
are we talking about?" Due to my continental reformed Protestant
background and my upbringing, my affinity is naturally the greatest
with Christianity. In my quest, and related to it, my college years, this
was my starting point. Essential to the question of whether it is possible
to identify the creative God is one's view of God. In other words: the
concept of God. Within the Christian view, God manifests Himself to
mankind in the person of Jesus. Jesus is presented as a god-man.
However, did the idea of God amongst the first Christians correspond
with this image of a god-man? This question proved to be crucial for
my faith and understanding of the religion. As far as the concept of
God in Christianity is concerned, this focusses on answering the
question of whether Jesus is God.

The Trinity

Within Christianity, the triune God has been a definitive holy
doctrine since the council of Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon
(451). It reflects the idea that man needs to understand God as a
Trinity. The concept of God consists of God the Father, the Son and
the Holy Spirit. These are three independent Divine persons, yet one in
essence. They are all eternal and uncreated. Augustine wrote in 397 that
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Within Christianity, the triune God has been a definitive holy doctrine since the council of Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451). It reflects the idea that man needs to understand God as a Trinity. The concept of God consists of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These are three independent Divine persons, yet one in essence. They are all eternal and uncreated. Augustine wrote in 397 that God is "simple multiplicity and multiple simplicity" (Augustine of

Hippo, 'On the Trinity'). That this is an enigmatic idea to fathom is also clear from the fact that it took the Church centuries to come to a decisive argument regarding the interpretation of the various Biblical texts on the relationship between God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. This eventually resulted in the classical doctrine of the Trinity. The length and duration of this dispute partially relates to the historical opposition which emphasised that the Trinity as such does not occur in the Bible.

Moreover, the most evident Trinitarian reference (John 1:5:7-8) is undeniably a later addition to the original text (Metzger, 1971). In fact, the Apostolic Fathers do not mention this passage and it does not appear in the earliest Greek manuscripts. It is also clear, as mentioned by Professor Abdal Hakim Murad in his article 'The Trinity is Incoherent' (2013), that the Jewish Jesus himself did not preach any Trinitarian theology as he, just like the authors of the (Synoptic) Gospels, was firmly upon monotheism. Thus, we read in the Biblical book of Mark, Jesus' response to the most important Divine command. Verse 12:29 states: "And Jesus answered him: The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord."

In the Acts of the Apostles of the New Testament, we also read about the Jews and their beliefs. We read about their debates regarding faith in God. The proclamation of a God in three persons, however, does not seem to have been part of the message of the first followers of Jesus. Professor Abdal Hakim Murad writes:

> The dominant message in the New Testament is Jewish monotheism. There are texts, however, where an apparent triad is named. For example: 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19). Another instance is: 'Chosen

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (Peter 1:1-2). Although minds shaped by creedal formulas instinctively read these as Trinitarian statements, the original context of first century Palestine makes this unlikely. The idea of a perichoretic union of self-aware hypostases, each of which was entirely God, came later.

That is, in the eighth century with John of Damascus. We also read in the (Biblical) Epistle to the Colossians (1:15) that Christ is 'the firstborn of every creature'? If Christ is created, has there then existed a time before he was created? God, however, is eternal. Professor Abdal Hakim Murad continues:

> In the Bible, Jesus sometimes appears explicitly to deny that he is Divine. Texts include, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Mark 10:18), and "The son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19). Similarly, Jesus is frequently depicted as having non-Divine qualities, including temptation, fear, indecision, and lack of knowledge, as at Gethsemane, where he is intensely afraid, so that God sends an angel to strengthen and reassure him (Luke 22:39-46). Jesus does not know the date of the second coming (Mark 13:32). Again and again he is portrayed as obedient to the Father, and sent by Him, "learning obedience" (Hebrews 5:8).
>
> Since such qualities conflict with what is logically known of God, the Gospel writers are here clearly presenting him as a non-Divine being. Later generations, seeking to harmonise this with the evolved doctrine of his fully Divine nature, developed, on the basis of Philippians 2:5-11, the idea of *kenosis*, whereby God, as the second person, "emptied" Himself of aspects of His Godhead during the three decades of His existence on earth.

The consequence of this was a double paradox: not only can a single entity be fully Divine and fully human (i.e. infinite and finite simultaneously), but that same entity can disengage aspects of deity at will without becoming less fully Divine… (Murad, 2013)

This last part is necessary, considering that the doctrine of perfection of the incarnation and the doctrine of atonement cannot be impaired. The idea that Jesus is God ('the same as'; in Greek, 'homo-ousios'), the second person within the concept of the Trinity, is most explicitly expressed by the Church through the term 'God, the Son'. However, just as in the case of the earlier suggested explicit references to the divinity of Jesus, this expression does not occur anywhere in the Bible either. Frequently mentioned is Jesus being the 'son of God'. This expression, however, had a completely different connotation *for the Jews* at the time (which is what most of the first Christians were) than what was usually understood [by it] in the Hellenistic world of days gone by.

Jewish monotheism and Hellenic deities

The New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman ('How Jesus became God') as well as the late Raymond E. Brown (famed American Biblical scholar *and* priest), state that within ancient Greek and Roman culture there existed roughly three kinds of Divine manifestation. Besides the temporary appearance of the gods *themselves* as human beings, man could also—literally and biologically—have a Divine father or mother. This brought forth people with supernatural powers. These 'sons and daughters of god' were called demigods.

Finally, the Divine could also (gradually) manifest in ordinary human beings. 'Exaltation' to Divine status could take place in this life as well as after passing away (such as in the case of Romulus, for example). During the period that Jesus walked the earth, being a 'son of God', for

heathens (i.e. non-Jews), meant that someone partially or completely inherited 'divinity' from a Divine father (thereby making a son of a god a demigod).

Professor Abdal Hakim Murad writes (2013):

However, it is a commonplace of modern scholarship that in an Aramaic and Hebrew milieu such a phrase carried no pagan implications, but denoted angelic, rabbinic, messianic, or kingly authority. Hence 'sons of God' [*b'nai ha-Elohim*] are angels, or inspired men (Genesis 6:2; Job 1:6; Psalms 29:1).

There is no mention of any likeness to God. The term 'sons of God' displays, within the Jewish context of that period, that language was being employed in which the 'Divine', disconnected from God the Creator, could be defined more broadly. It appears to have intersected with the third Hellenic path of Divine manifestation: the exaltation of a human to God. In reading the New Testament, it is therefore unlikely that this term in the case of Jesus refers to a status of literal divinity (Moreland, 2013), but rather refers to an exalted status because of his exceptionality.

In my quest for an answer to the question 'who is God?', the above meant—due to the pivotal role of Jesus within Christianity—that I would increasingly question the way in which Jesus was considered to be God or Divine.

Christian soteriology

Within Christian dogmatism, faith in the divinity of Jesus (i.e. the concept of the Divine Trinity) is inseparably connected to the doctrine of spiritual salvation: the forgiving of sins through having faith in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Within Christianity, Jesus is both

fully God *and* fully man. This principle is called dyophysitism, or the doctrine of the two natures. Even though monophysitical currents exist as well (one nature in which Divine and the human [qualities] are unified and not separate), both views explicitly ascribe divinity to Jesus. Within the Christian framework, incarnation is of elementary importance. Jesus lived the life of a human being, but did not have a sinful nature as ordinary mortals have. Sin entered this world through Adam by his eating of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge (of good and evil) (Genesis 3). The sinful nature of Adam (after this intrinsic breach with God) has been passed on to every new-born since (Romans 5:12). This is called the doctrine of the Original Sin. However, because Jesus did not have an earthly father, he did not inherit this sinful nature. He inherited the Divine nature from his heavenly Father. Jesus was required to fulfil all the conditions of a holy God before he could become a suitable offering for our sins (John 8:29, Hebrews 9:14).

Ever since the (sinful) fall of man (Genesis 3:21-23), the practice of (innocent) human sacrifice has been *the* way to redeem oneself with God (Leviticus 9:2, Numbers 28:19, Deuteronomy 15:21, Hebrews 9:22). The idea of Jesus as the final perfect sacrifice that would forever satisfy the wrath of God upon sin fits within this religious paradigm. The Divine nature of Christ made him a suitable candidate for the task as the Redeemer. His human body allowed Him to spill the blood that was necessary for redemption. No other human being with a sinful nature could repay such a debt. Nobody else could fulfil the requirements of becoming the sacrifice for [redeeming] the sins of the entire world (Matthew 26:28, John 1:2:2).

From a young age, and becoming intensified in the past three or four years, I struggled with the above Christological complex: Jesus as the necessary sacrifice for the sake of forgiving sins. This raised and

continues to raise questions regarding the attributes of God and the internal logic of the Biblical reading of the story of the fall of man. For example, why could God not forgive without the blood sacrifice of His son and are the sins of the likes of Adam, Abraham, and Noah, who lived before Jesus, forgiven? If so, what is the reason for this necessity for a human blood sacrifice (at a later stage in world history)? Moreover, this dogma seems to be diametrically opposed to the following texts of the Old Testament. In Hosea (6:6) it is written: "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." In the Biblical book of Deuteronomy (24:16), we read: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." Also, Ezekiel (18:20) states: "The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." Furthermore, in the New Testament (Matthew 12:7), we also read about the Divine request for mercy instead of sacrifice. In fact, Jesus himself explicitly refers to the will of God. Jesus says: "But go ye and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13).

Finally, the parable in Luke (15:11-32) that Jesus himself mentions to his disciples (regarding the lost son) clearly reflects the way in which God, according to Jesus, deals with the sinner. In this parable, there is no mention of the necessity of a murder or blood sacrifice. Considering the character of redemption that such a blood sacrifice carries within it, this seems to narrow the concept of forgiveness. In the parable, the father forgives the son without 'ifs and buts' and embraces him in his arms again. This evangelical text reads:

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"And he (Jesus) said: 'A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father: "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me." And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said: "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, while I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.'" And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But the father said to his servants: "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him: "Thy brother has come; and thy father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound." And he was angry, and would not go in; therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he, answering, said to his father: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither have I transgressed at any time thy

commandment; and yet thou never gave me a goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this, thy son has come, which has devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." And he said unto him: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."'"

Personal consequences

Besides the intellectual impediment in fathoming the concept of the Trinity, the questions mentioned above regarding the Biblical foundation for the concept of a human sacrifice as a necessity for complete redemption began to form structural obstacles in my accepting the Christian representation of God. As mentioned before in this writing, in my opinion, atheism does not give a satisfactory answer to the question of Truth. I have discussed the basic arguments for this view in the second chapter. With God as the singular, ontological explanation and, for me, the no longer satisfactory concept of God within Christianity, I began focussing my attention on the (only) strict monotheistic religions: Judaism and Islam.

Compared to Islam, Judaism was initially much more attractive to me. The shared basis (Tanakh or Old Testament), cultural proximity (the Judeo-Christian tradition) and recognition played a pivotal role in this. The status of Jesus—or rather the lack thereof—within the Jewish religion, and the limited religious appreciation for him, however, gave me an impression of inadequacy. This obviously relates to my Christian upbringing and being convinced of the inspired moral message of Christ.

Despite the impressive ensemble of the Jewish law, the moving and long history [of its people] and the fact that Judaism forms the basis for contemporary monotheistic traditions, its view of Jesus lead me to revisit Islam. My increased antipathy throughout the years regarding Islam did not change the fact that it is the only religion, besides Christianity, in which Jesus has a special status as an inspired figure and Messenger of God. The lack of a Trinitarian view of God within Islam required, in all honesty, further analysis.

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"We also believe in God, you know. We just say Allah, but that is the same I think. I am not sure though. I cannot read those letters on that painting that you like either. My dad can though."

Walid, a childhood friend from my neighbourhood, who said that people in Egypt also believe in God (mid-1980s)

5. The concept of God in Islam

"Your God is one God. There is no God but He, the most Gracious, most Merciful."

Quran 2:163

One God

Belief in one universal all-creating God is the most important and fundamental tenet of Islam. In Islam, monotheism, in the strict meaning of the term, is referred to as *tawhid*. Muslims believe in one God Who has created the universe and has power over all that is contained within. He is unique and exalted above everything that He creates, and His greatness cannot be compared to His creation. Moreover, He is the only One Who deserves to be worshipped. The ultimate purpose of the entire creation is to 'submit' to Him (the word *'islam'* literally means 'submission' and not the often-heard 'peace').

In Islam, God is often discussed with regard to His attributes. There are ninety-nine terms, it is said, that refer to the names and attributes of God. These names and attributes express different aspects of God, and nevertheless refer to the one being of God. A metaphor for these characteristics, mentioned by the earlier cited Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, are the numerous colours that appear with the breaking of light. More than with any other religion, the words of the founder of scholastics— archbishop Anselmus of Canterbury—regarding the being of God (for humanity) apply most of all to Islam: "that of which anything greater cannot be conceived [*id quo maius nihil cogitari potest*]."

The abstract and complete exaltation of God characterises the concept of the Divine in Islam. Although this idea can be accompanied by a certain distance—and this is how I, as an outsider with a Christian

upbringing, always understood it—God, within Islam, is considered to be nearer to man than his own jugular vein (Quran 50:16). Due to its abstract and logical consistency, the Islamic concept of God paradoxically seems to be much closer to the command of Jesus in the Biblical book of Mark (12:30) than to the Christian dogma of the Trinity: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

It is not an incomprehensible mystery, but a single Truth, a concept that is fathomable and imitable for the human mind. This also seems to do justice to the human being who, apart from emotion, is also driven by rationality, the latter of which he requires (especially in our postmodern era of critical thinking) in order to understand God, to speak about Him and—in the words of Christ—to love him. Because of the tenet that there is also nothing closer to the individual human being than God, the intrinsic human need to be able to connect with the Highest (as religious scholar Eliade called it) is fulfilled.

Is Allah the same as God?

From a young age, and this is certainly related to the Christian denomination from which I hail, I had always considered (related) religions and worldviews as variations of, or deviations from, (Protestant) orthodox Christian teachings. In my late teens, I began to relativize this conviction, albeit in a limited fashion. Studying other religions broadened my horizon and offered some room for doubts and further contemplation upon the unique and exceptional character of my own religion, as I understood and experienced it. It seemed that there were more religious roads leading to Rome. However, I was convinced that none of these roads went through Mecca. My reservation towards Islam was much stronger than towards other religious traditions. This

has always been somewhat paradoxical. After all, there are many similarities between Islam and Christianity, such as believing in a single Creator, the concept of revelation, angels, heaven and hell, Jesus (albeit in a different sense), a linear sequence of time, the Day of Judgment and many Prophets from the Old Testament. In fact it seems almost like a sort of brotherly competition—this set of theological similarities that cause the distance between them to increase on those points of difference, such as how to understand the being of God and Christ.

The more than a thousand years of 'cultivated resistance' obviously also plays a role in how Christian Europe has viewed Islam. The Church, in fact, considered Islam, as a concept, to be a Christian heresy. As a result of this hostility, for centuries on end, Muhammad has been portrayed as overly sensual, an imposter, a barbarian, an antichristian and a deceiver. In sum, he has been portrayed as a false prophet (see also chapter 6). False prophets are clearly not guided by the Truth and do not proclaim the message of God. Herein lay my personal aversion, namely the idea that the Islamic god was essentially an idol, more specifically: an Arabian moon god.

This idea of Allah as a moon god has more recently taken shape within various Christian denominations, led by the works of Dr. Robert Morey. Around twenty-five years ago, he wrote the book 'The Moon-god Allah: In Archaeology of the Middle East'. Herein, he states that the 'Arabian god', 'Allah', is of a pagan origin and referred to the deity Hubal in the pre-Islamic era. In his later book 'The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest-Growing Religion' (2001), he once more presented this theory. The idea is not new. During my college years, I had the opportunity to read a work by the German Professor Winckler (from the beginning of the twentieth century). He was the first to argue (around 1900) that the pre-Islamic deity Hubal was a

moon god, and that 'Allah' in Islam was a 'modern' manifestation of this ancient Arabian deity. The core of the theory is based on the fact that the crescent moon, as a symbol, was related to Hubal in the pre-Islamic era, and that after it, within Islam, the lunar calendar has been used as well, as has the symbolism of the crescent moon (as can be found on many mosques).

Even though there exists a similarity with the symbol of the crescent moon, there is no moon god in Islam and the use of the lunar calendar, as well as crescent symbolism on many mosques, are unrelated to Hubal. The Quran (41:37) even explicitly states that it is false to consider the moon as an object of worship and that only God (as the Creator) is to be worshipped: "And of His signs are the night and day, and the sun and moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or to the moon, but prostate to Allah, who created them, if it is Him that you worship." The moon also plays no religious role whatsoever within Islam. Caliph 'Umar introduced a lunar Islamic calendar in the year 638 primarily for practical reasons, as there was some confusion in communication with parts of the caliphate at the time.

Maintaining a lunar calendar can also be found in the Quran (2:189): "They ask you, (O Muhammad), about the new moons. Say: 'They are measurements of time for the people and for Hajj…'" Moreover, having a calendar revolve around a celestial body does not make its initiators worshippers of said celestial body. Muslims do not worship any moon god because of this, just like the Western world (with our Christian, Gregorian solar calendar) does not worship a sun god.

As for the placing of the crescent moon on some Islamic flags: the origin of this lies in the Byzantine Empire, and after the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottomans adopted some of its symbolism, such as the crescent moon and star. This cultural inheritance re-emerged with the formation of later nation states in flags and (heraldic) weaponry, amongst other things. The decoration on the top of minarets likewise emerged throughout history due to interaction with Christians, whose places of worship were very recognisable due to the sign of the cross. In response to this, Muslims placed a crescent moon on the top of the minaret. An Arabian cult revolving around a moon god that later developed into Islam is completely out of the question.

Based on the above arguments and others, most scholars have rejected the theory of Morey (and before that, of Winckler) during the course of the twentieth century. Leeming and the earlier mentioned Eliade pointed out that Hubal—despite of the crescent moon symbolism—was a god of rain. The late Danish Professor Patricia Crone, who was very critical of Islam, was of the opinion that the theory had no serious basis. Finally, the renowned Professor Küng mentioned that it is a very weak hypothesis. Morey citing Professor Winckler and using him as a source is remarkable to begin with, considering that Morey is quite orthodox in his faith, while Winckler was a very secularly inspired Assyriologist. Winckler was also of the opinion, for example, that the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were nothing more than anthropomorphic expressions of the Babylonian worship of the sun, moon and stars (Winckler, 1901). This is of course completely contrary to everything Morey, as an orthodox Christian, stands for. In other words, not only the ultimate focus of worship within Islam was reduced by the Assyriologist to an extrapolation of a barbarian faith, the fundamentals of Judaism and Christianity—and with it, monotheism in its entirety—were also relativized in terms of being the truth. Morey, however, did not adopt this aspect of Winckler's view. This seems to make Morey's plea, at its core, somewhat selective as well.

The etymology of the word 'Allah'

The refutation of the idea that the God of Islam was in fact a moon god, and with it, that the entire Islamic religion was an ancient form of idolatry, changed my perception. However, my personal question regarding the origin of 'Allah' remained. Further analysis based on etymology could have provided more clarity on this matter, which I assumed to be of a pagan origin. The problem with the hypotheses—based on inscriptions, amongst other things—with regard to pre-Islamic deities from the Semitic world can be particularly found, so I heard during my college years, in the fact that every inscription before the advent of Islam also precedes the introduction of diacritic marks within Semitic languages. Considering that Arabic is an abjad, an alphabet of consonants and contains practically no vowels, the concrete and specific meaning of inscriptions or words in ancient texts without diacritic marks is not always free of speculation. Theories without a strong empirical foundation, therefore, seem to be rather a reflection of the religious biases of the researcher than doing justice to the (sometimes summary) findings.

The term for 'God' in the Semitic world consists—since ancient times—of merely two letters: the consonant 'l', preceded by what can be best described as a short breath, which—together—is pronounced as 'El' in Hebrew, which forms the basis for the more familiar 'Eloh' (from which 'Elohim' is also derived). In the related Aramaic, 'God' was denoted with the term 'Alaha', and in Arabic with 'Ilah' and the later 'al-Ilah' (which means *the* god'). The word 'Allah' that we are familiar with would be a contraction of these Arabic words, or a variation of the Aramaic term. The word 'Allah' is in fact unique in the Arabic language. It is the only word that has neither a plural form nor a grammatical gender. There is no masculine or feminine principle that applies to God and—in line with the concept of *tawhid*—the term solely exists as an expression of singularity. Linguistically speaking, God is a term that stands on its own in Arabic. There were also numerous classical Islamic scholars of the opinion that the word 'Allah' does not have any etymological origin.

Theologically speaking, we also see that the use of this word reappears throughout history and is much older. Not only the Islamic tradition uses the term 'Allah' to denote God, Jews and Christians from the region have been doing so even before the Islamic era. Even today, the Arabic translation of the Christian Bible uses the exact same word for God. Finally, few know that even in Europe, amongst the Catholics of Malta, God is denoted with the word 'Alla' (without the 'h'). The origin of the Islamic term for God is—linguistically speaking—not any different from that of the other (Semitic) monotheistic religions. Any particular pagan foundation of the Islamic deity is therefore, etymologically speaking as well, out of the question.

Islamic soteriology

As mentioned in the previous chapter, both orthodox Christology and the concept of atonement within Christianity had become obstacles to my acceptance of the Christian concept of God. It had already occurred to me that within Islamic soteriology there existed a more direct relationship between man and God. The Islamic concepts behind the related principles of 'sin' and 'atonement' were less clear to me. Abdal Hakim Murad, professor of Islamic theology at Cambridge University, rightfully states regarding this matter that when Christians speak of sin, they immediately think in terms of an Atoner: Jesus Christ. He also mentions that when Muslims speak of sin, they think in terms of the book—the Quran—that, according to Islam, reminds mankind of a bond. The Islamic understanding of terms such as 'sin', 'broken

bond' and 'reminder' differ significantly from what we find in the Bible. 'Sin' is not redeemed by another and is not 'inherited'. Personal salvation does not depend on an Atoner who had to bear the thorn of God and—after crucifixion—overcame death and Satan.

As briefly mentioned above, in Islam salvation primarily relates to the recognition of the testimony of the soul in a pre-mortal state. This is a testimonial to life in a universal reality in which God is at its absolute centre. In the Quran, we read about this (7:172): "And (mention) when your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify of themselves, (saying to them): 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yes, we have testified.' Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection: 'Verily, we were unaware of this.'" Within this paradigm, man knows the existential truth of the creation and the Creator. He is thus also considered naturally believing (on *din al-fitra*). 'Sin' is, broadly speaking, not living up to—and therefore believing in—the reality of God. In other words, sin is to (personally) deny Him.

With the idea of a bond that precedes earthly existence, memorising the Quran begets a deeper meaning. By reciting it, Muslims remind themselves of that which their souls have testified to: God as the ultimate reality. It is remarkable that, in this respect, the Quranic concept of 'sin', with its idea of a pre-existential realisation of the Truth, is much closer to Greek Platonic thought (the world of ideas) than the Hebrew concept of sin, which is completely dedicated to following the Torah in this worldly existence. We also see that within Islamic soteriology there is a stark contrast with Christianity: each soul is its own representative and only the individual can be held responsible before God. One is not [necessarily] absolved by God through having faith alone. The requirement of a correct practice [of the religion] and performing good deeds is elementary, and necessary for the

completeness of faith. We can trace this back to the Quran (18:110): "...So whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord—let him do good deeds and not associate anyone in the worship of his Lord."

Finally, the Divine does not manifest in one ultimate intervention (Jesus' death on the cross in Golgotha) in terms of the redemption of mankind, for God's mercy is everlasting, unrestricted and of all times: "And verily, We have sent to every nation a Messenger..." (Quran 16:36)

Source

With this last consideration regarding the soteriology within Islam and the earlier analysis of the origin of 'Allah'—etymologically as well—I noticed that my view on the Islamic concept of God had significantly changed. Nevertheless, in my quest for God, there remained numerous questions with regard to the source of this religion: the founder of Islam and its view of God. Who was, according to Islamic sources, this final Messenger exactly? Was he, as had been taught in Europe for centuries, indeed an imposter, a charlatan and a false prophet? Or was it time for a revision of this person? In other words: who was Muhammad?

"Do you know what it says, then? Nothing that is not correct, though. It was quite a puzzle with a colleague to get the text to fit exactly as it is on the actual flag. By the way, it translates as: 'Islam is a Lie. Muhammad is a crook. The Quran is poison.' If we look at Muhammad's life, we see the life of a tyrant, a murderer and a sensualist. He fought countless of battles against innocent people, had people tortured, deeply hated the Jews, kept many women on the side and created an army without any empathy. The fruits of his message are solely bitter. Islam is an ideology of terror, death and destruction. Why should you not be able to say this openly? We have actually been quite mild with the text on that sticker."

My response to the question posed by relatives on why there was a need for the anti-Islam sticker in the form of the Saudi flag (2013)

6. Muhammad: Messenger in a Biblical sense?

"The lies, which well-meaning zeal has heaped round this man
(Muhammad) are disgraceful to ourselves only."

Thomas Carlyle

The above quote by the nineteenth century Scottish historian and agnostic has fascinated me ever since I first saw it during the second year of my studies. How could someone who has studied the history of Islam and, more specifically, the life of Muhammad, reach such a conclusion? It could not be because of political correctness. After all, postmodernism, secularisation and cultural Marxist concepts had not been introduced yet. Was the good man not familiar with the darker side of Islamic history? With all the violence, the Islamic conversions by the sword, the inferior position of women, the intolerance of people with different beliefs, the religion's overall character and with all those things that are diametrically opposed to the Western understanding of freedom? Or has today's image of Islam primarily been formed by the historically marginal Wahhabi interpretation, which, thanks to the billions of dollars spent on propaganda and present-day terrorism, has become the norm for the past decades?

Revelation

Historical Western criticism of Muhammad as a Messenger can, of course, not be viewed in isolation from the Christian perspective of the content of his message. His first revelation has also been a point of criticism within certain Christian circles. I too found this aspect objectionable, theologically speaking. Within the Christian framework, the image exists that angels always come in peace and first comfort the

person they approach, such as when Mary heard that she would become pregnant with Jesus, or the meeting with Daniel, whose fear was taken away at first. It seemed to me that their role within the Islamic narrative was much less benevolent towards man.

The first meeting between Muhammad and the angel Gabriel was in fact terrifying. In the Hadith collection of al-Bukhari (vol. 1, book 1, no. 3), we find the following narration: "…The angel came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet replied: 'I do not know how to read.' The Prophet added: 'The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read and I replied: "I do not know how to read." Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time until I could no longer bear it. He then released me and again asked me to read, but again I replied: "I do not know how to read (or: "what shall I read?")" Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said: "Read in the name of your Lord, who has created (all that exists), and has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous." (Quran 96:1, 96:2, 96:3) Then Allah's Messenger returned with the inspiration and with his heart beating hard. He went to (his wife) Khadija bint Khuwaylid and said: 'Cover me! Cover me!' She covered him until his fear passed and after that he told her everything that had happened and said: 'I fear that something may happen to me.' Khadija replied: 'Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones.'"

After this event took place, Muhammad thought he may have become possessed and, according to the oldest biography about him (written by Ibn Ishaq), wanted to take his own life: "I thought… 'I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down, that I may kill

myself and gain rest.' So I went forth to do so, and then, when I was midway up the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying: 'O Muhammad! Thou art the Messenger of God and I am Gabriel.'"

After a closer look into the meetings with angels as described in the Bible, I noticed that Jewish and Christian sources, too, quite often do not portray a soothing context. For example, in the first description of angels in the Bible, we read that they were designated to guard the Tree of Life. The angels had a guarding, protective task; not to protect mankind and safeguard him from misery, but to guard and protect against the misery of man. 1 Chronicles 21:15 (regarding King David), describes how an angel of God had begun to destroy the city of Jerusalem: "And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the Lord beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed: 'It is enough, stay now thine hand…'" Similarly, 2 Kings 19:35 mentions the destructive acts of an angel of God: "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

Not only passages from the Old Testament mention angels that strike fear, in the New Testament as well (Luke 1:18-20) we read how the angel Gabriel punishes the father of John the Baptist (Zacharias), after the angel comforted him at first: "And Zacharias said unto the angel: 'Whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well stricken in years.' And the angel, answering, said unto him: 'I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believes not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.'"

These texts forced me to modify my previous perception of the revelation and the meeting by angels as it was understood within Christianity. It also shines a new light upon Muhammad's meeting with Gabriel. The manifestation and revelation of the sacred takes places in a broader and more diverse fashion than I had previously assumed. In this respect, we may mention the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937). He spoke of a *mysterium tremendum* and a *mysterium fascinans*. It is an attempt to describe the experience with the inexpressibly sacred, the transcendent. He calls this transcendence the 'numinous'. It manifests itself in two ways: as the *mysterium tremendum* ("deterring mystery"), which is characterised as terrifying, overwhelming and infinite; and as the *mysterium fascinosum* ("attracting mystery"), which is characterised by power, smaller and greater beauty and the ideal of an atoning force. Muhammad's first revelation may therefore very well be considered to belong to the category of the *mysterium tremendum*. After all, the overwhelming presence of Gabriel and the terrifying way in which Muhammad was ordered to recite are fitting this context. The history of different religions is then one of different Messengers, with a very clear and context-specific form, revelation and interaction with the Higher. With it, my theological suspicions regarding the source of Muhammad's first revelation vanished, but did that make Muhammad a Prophet in a Biblical sense?

Deuteronomy 18:18

Considering that Islam proclaims a final message that—chronologically and to a great extent theologically—is in line with Judaism and Christianity, it may be expected that the central figure of this religion—Muhammad—can also be found in the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. Of course, this discussion is not a new one.

Throughout the centuries, epistles have been written and debates have taken place with regard to the question of whether (the Prophethood) of Muhammad is mentioned in these scriptures. Islamic exegetes and apologists refer in this respect to texts from the Old Testament—such as Deuteronomy 18:18—as well as texts from the New Testament—such as John 1:19-21.

In Deuteronomy 18:18, God says to Moses: "I will raise for them a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him." The text of John 1: 19-21 states: "And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him (John the Baptist): 'Who art thou?' And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed: 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him: What then? Art thou Elijah?' And he said: 'I am not.' 'Art thou that Prophet?' And he answered: 'No.'" Since the text from John, according to Christian tradition, refers to the Prophet from Deuteronomy 18, the connection between the two texts is evident. Moreover, the text in John apparently clarifies that the coming of a Prophet besides the Messiah was expected. The first letter of John (1 John 4:1), in which it is commanded to test the Prophets, also points to this expectation of Prophets to come. Here, in fact, explicitly after Jesus: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

To whom did this expectation apply, and how does this expectation relate to Muhammad? The Prophet described in Deuteronomy 18, according to the text, must have the following three characteristics:

1. He will be like Moses.
2. He will appear amidst his brethren. In a narrow sense, these are the Israelites, and in a broader sense the Ishmaelites.

3. God will place His words in the mouth of the Prophet in question and the Prophet would speak with what God commanded him.

The first characteristic is that this Prophet will be like Moses. The Christian tradition states that this refers to Jesus. Muslims, however, point to the major differences between Jesus and Moses and the similarities between Moses and Muhammad. Remarkable characteristics of Jesus are his miraculous birth and the miraculous way in which he returned to God. Furthermore, he was not concerned with the practices of day-to-day living and the formation and leadership of an earthly society. His way of living showed rather strong ascetic traits. He even explicitly stated that the Kingdom he was speaking of was not of this world (John 18:36). Moses, however, experienced a natural birth and a natural death. Moreover, his life was largely dedicated to leading his community and thereby forming a 'society', including the implementation of rules and laws. These things clearly apply to Muhammad as well.

The second characteristic of the Prophet from Deuteronomy 18 relates to his descent. The Prophet in question would descent from the brethren of the Israelites. In a narrow (and literal) sense, this can refer to the Israelites themselves. However, in a broad sense, it refers to the Ishmaelites (Arabs). These are the descendants of Abram's (later Abraham) eldest son, the brother of Isaac (who was the patriarch of the Israelites or Jews). A Prophet who both shows similarities with Moses and is a descendant of Ishmael is Muhammad.

The third characteristic, namely that this Prophet will speak the words of (the) God (of Moses), also seems clearly applicable to Muhammad. As described earlier, the Islamic narrative states that Muhammad is ordered by the angel Gabriel to literally recite God's word. Considering the way

in which this took place, it should be clear that it was not a matter of choice; neither the revelation, nor the experience, nor the contents thereof. Furthermore, the similarity between the message that Moses brought and the message that Muhammad proclaimed is unmistakable. The central message of Moses is: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord, our God, is one Lord." (Deuteronomy 6:4) The core of Muhammad's proclamation regarding the attributes of God is fully in line with the message of Moses, which is as follows: "Your God is one God. There is no god but He, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful." (Quran 2:163)

Prophetic violence in the Bible

Besides the context surrounding the first revelation and the question of whether Muhammad somewhat fitted the description of the Prophet from Deuteronomy 18, I had many other objections regarding Muhammad and his message. The use and religious legitimisation of violence was a not unimportant one. What I associated with Muhammad in this regard was, partly because of the track record of extremist Muslims and Wahhabi exegesis [*tafsir*], solely negative. Such a violent person, with such ideas, seemed to be diametrically opposed to the central message of Jesus, and with it, of course, the message of God in the Bible.

For is God not love? Nevertheless, somewhere I felt—particularly from a Christian perspective—that violence as a criterion to question Muhammad's Prophethood was somewhat duplicitous. After all, any Christian who is familiar with the Old Testament knows that the Bible, too, speaks of various Messengers who did not hesitate to use violence, while the context in which such violence took place stood perhaps further away from us than the historical 'Muhammad-related violence'.

That being said, killing in the name of an ideology, a greater idea, and therefore also in the name of God, is almost always a doubtful matter. Especially in our pacified society in which the realities of the heavy use of military force have become a remote spectacle, far away from our personal lives, and in which any violence is by definition suspicious. History clearly shows that this has not always been the case. Considering that violence, whether we like it or not, forms an integral part of our history and life on earth, we find this reflected in a book of life such as the Bible as well, no matter how outrageous the stories sometimes appear to be. As mentioned before, even with the 'men of God'.

For example, we read in 1 Kings 18:40 that Elijah killed his religious opponents: "And Elijah said unto them: 'Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.' And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there." The Prophet Elijah, who was ridiculed for being bald, cursed the youthful perpetrators in the name of God, after which forty-two children were devoured by bears (2 Kings 2:24). The Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorra is also very violent. Complete cities, including all women, children, animals and even crops, were destroyed (Genesis 19:24-25). In the Biblical book of Deuteronomy, which belongs to the Torah, Moses explains to the Israelites, in various speeches, how to treat the opponent in case of war. In Deuteronomy 20:13-14 we read: "…Thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword. But the women, and the children, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God has given thee." Furthermore, we read in Deuteronomy 20:16: "But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breathes."

Similarly, the Prophet Joshua (the first successor to Moses) is not known for his pacifism. In the Bible book of the same name (10:40) we are told: "Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded." In Joshua 11:14-15 it is written: "And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe. As the Lord commanded Moses, his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses." In the Biblical Old Testament, 1 Samuel (15:3), it is written about the 'the ban' [*herem*]. Saul hears, through the Prophet, priest and judge Samuel, that he must defeat the Amalekites: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

Considering the passages mentioned above and the role violence played in the lives of the Prophets of our own Judeo-Christian tradition, the criterion of violence cannot immediately be brought forward to disqualify Muhammad as a Prophet. Even more so considering the fact that the historical contexts of the Islamic narrations—which will be elaborated upon later in this work—are of a different character than those of the Bible, but also, classically speaking, are understood quite differently from the often-heard Wahhabi exegesis (which, in part, formed my perception).

What about Jesus?

Within my Christian paradigm, the existing differentiation between the Old and the New Testament was also an important point with regard to the comparison between Muhammad's battles and those of the Biblical Messengers. There may have been various Prophets of the Old Testament that did not hesitate to use violence, but the message of Jesus and his way of living, as the ultimate image of God, was clearly of a very different kind. After a closer look, however, it turned out that Jesus was less pacifistic than often presumed. The progressive 1970s, with all its ideological whims, did not quietly pass theology either. The Marxist-oriented liberation theology was in a later stage relieved of its violent component, and partly due to the influence of theologian (and socialist) Karl Barth, we increasingly heard in the West about a supposed similarity between the Gospel and the ideological message of commune and 'solidarity'. This has clearly influenced the modern view of the person of Jesus, who at times (especially within secularised culture) began to show the characteristics of a happy hippy. Contrary to this distorted image of Jesus within contemporary popular culture, the more classical view of Christ can be traced back to the New Testament.

It is certainly true that the teachings of Jesus, at their core, consist of forgiveness and loving thy neighbour. The Sermon on the Mount and the entirety of his service are a clear reflection of this. However, in the New Testament, we also find passages that show a lesser exposed side of Christ: polarising, militant and even demanding retribution. We read in the Gospel of Matthew (10:34) the following words of Jesus: "Think not that I have come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but with a sword." In Luke 22:36 it states: "But now, he who has a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." In the last Biblical book, the Revelation of John, verse 19:15 informs us of how Jesus will eventually

return to earth and how he will act: "And out of his mouth comes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." In these texts, Jesus shows to be far from a hippy, that pacifism is out of the question and that an irreversible judgment will follow which is not free of violent aspects either.

Considering this, the criterion of violence as a reason to reject Muhammad is not very strong, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Jesus also did not denounce the use of violence categorically (and eschatologically). Moreover, Muhammad, besides being a spiritual leader, also had the worldly task of being a leader of a community with a significant territory.

Muhammad's message

A message of violence combined with an evil notion of God is obviously not an attractive story that, as an individual, instantly strikes one in a positive way. However, there also exists an alternative, more positive version to the history of Islam as often portrayed in the West, which has been partially described in the previous chapter. The image of Muhammad that many have in the West is that of a tyrant, a bloodthirsty conqueror and a bringer of suffering and misery. This image is often based on a combination of extreme images and ideas that are traced back to Wahhabi theology, to the classical Christian view of Islam as a heretical and deviant creed and to contemporary 'Islam-fearers' whose fears are not always justified, but certainly understandable considering the terrorist attacks and various misconceptions.

There is hardly ever any mention of any friendly, positive and admirable characteristics of Muhammad as a person and of his message. Nevertheless—according to the Hindu leader Mahatma Gandhi—it was because of his commitment, loyalty, simplicity, and belief in the correctness and goodness of his message, that Muhammad's call found such massive resonance. Gandhi said (in Young India, 1928, Vol X):

> I wanted to know the best of one who holds today's undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind… I became more than convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for his pledges, his intense devotion to this friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle. When I closed the 2nd volume (of the Prophet's biography), I was sorry there was not more for me to read of his great life.

According to the Islamic narrative, the mission of Muhammad was, amongst other things, an example of 'how to live' within numerous contexts. From household affairs and finances to governing and even military affairs. Therein, the principle of context is a decisive factor. When explained and studied correctly, Islam contains, as is also the case for Christianity, a message of justice, understanding and, above all, loving thy neighbours and loving God. Many see and hear, however, the opposite of that. I did too, for more than ten years. This is absolutely remarkable if we look at some 'silent' but essential passages from Islamic narrations.

A very important aspect of the central concept of submission *to* and the oneness *of* God (the literal meaning of the word 'Islam') is not, as has been claimed in some circles, 'a slavish following of', a joyless life or a purely legal affair; rather, it is love and mercy. Nowadays, the combination of Islam with love is not the first thing that comes to mind. It seems to be a nearly impossible idea, and yet it is an explicit statement from the Quran, says Dr. Jerald Dirks (clinical psychologist and Islamic publicist). Below, I will point out the three terms which I found to be particularly remarkable during my rereading of Islam and which Dr. Dirks has concisely described.

One of the names of God in Islam is *al-Wadud*: the most loving, the source of love, the most beloved and the most affectionate. Thus, we read in the Quran (11:90): "And ask your Lord for forgiveness, and repent to Him. My Lord is Merciful and Loving [*Wadud*]." In verse 85:14 as well, we read about the loving character of God: "And He is the Forgiving, the Loving [*al-Wadud*]." God is loving, this is what seems to be the message. In these passages, we see the direct love of God for His creation. There is no intermediary. It is direct: God loves man, without any detours. We find this message in numerous places within the Quran. God's love for those who do good, who are remorseful, who are pure, who remember Him and who are patient; but also those who are aware of their obligations, who 'patiently persevere' and who are tolerant, are mentioned specifically as groups whom God's love reaches.

A different, better-known name for God in the Quran is *al-Rahman*, the most Gracious. This name is referred to as many as one hundred and sixty-seven times. It is a message that is repeated again and again. A verse that can be mentioned in this context is verse 19:75: "Say:

'Whoever is in error, the Most Gracious will lead him on. Until they see what they were promised—either the punishment, or the Hour. Then they will know who was in a worse position and weaker in force."'

The mercy of God and His concern for mankind is also implied in the following Hadith *qudsi* (a narration that Muhammad ascribes to God): "I am *al-Rahman* and I created the *rahm* (womb) and named it after My name." The reason why the word *rahm* is used here, and the reason why God deduced its name from His own name, is explained in a number of ways within Islam.

One explanation for this is that the womb perfectly illustrates the idea of love, mercy and concern. After all, the womb forms a source of warmth and protection; it is *the* place in which someone grows for the first time and develops himself, and in which he is being cared for in an inimitable way. The baby lacks nothing in it. In this sense, God seems to say to mankind in this narration that he is cherished, protected and provided for with all that he needs to be a complete human being. God can be understood to be the concerned sustainer of life.

Finally, a third Islamic name for God in which His love for mankind is expressed within this tradition: *al-Rahim*, the most Merciful. The Quran mentions this 227 times. No other attribute of God is mentioned this often. Verse 7:156 speaks of the breadth of His mercy. With regard to this point, the verse states: "'And decree for us in this world (that which is) good and (also) in the Hereafter; verily, we have turned back to You.' He (Allah) said: 'My punishment—I afflict with it whom I will; but My mercy encompasses all things.'"

The extent of this mercy, as has been emphasised, is many times greater than Divine justice. The message regarding the sanctioning of unlawful behaviour, in terms of its image, does not suffer from a lack

of interest. Interest in the much greater reach of mercy, however, is strangely enough rather sparse. In verse 39:53, we find: "Say: 'O My servants who have transgressed against themselves (by sinning), do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Verily, Allah forgives all sins. Verily, it is He who is the most Forgiving, most Merciful.'" There exists forgiveness for all sins, provided that repentance is sincere and forgiveness is sought. In addition, verse 2:143 reads as follows: "Verily, Allah is, to the people, most Kind and most Merciful." It is not the term 'believers', 'Muslims' or any other specific group that is being used at the end of this verse, but the general term 'people'. God has concern for *all* people.

Islam, in fact, teaches (as we find in another Hadith *qudsi*) that God approaches man. He makes an effort to touch upon the reality of the individual person. The Hadith in question is as follows: "He who draws near Me a hand's span, I will draw near him an arm's length. And whoever draws near Me an arm's length, I will draw near him a fathom's length. And whoever comes to Me walking, I will go to him running." When a seeking person takes a step towards God, God takes two steps towards the seeker. The image of the message of God that is portrayed here is one of loving concern and kindness.

It is this message that Gandhi spoke of when he highlighted the life of Muhammad. This message, and not the rattling of terrorists, is what spoke to and continues to speak to the "hearts of millions of mankind." In order to be accepted, the message can obviously not diametrically oppose the attitude of the Messenger himself. The reputation of the Messenger, however, is not uncontroversial, as we have discussed in this chapter.

However, there is an abundance of sources available, from Western scholars, and naturally from Islamic scholars as well, which typify

Muhammad's character in a very different fashion from what is today often the case. In my personal quest, Muhammad as a person and his character were a crucial matter. In the many books and articles that I began to restudy regarding this topic, an image appeared that required a further revision of my 'old' views on Muhammad's character. The description of Muhammad given by the eighteenth century German orientalist Dr. Gustav Weil, in his 'History of Islamic Peoples', is striking in this context. Even though he makes several unflattering remarks—in line with the anti-Islamic sentiment in the West—he also mentions a number of positive characteristics. He states that Muhammad set a shining example to his people, that his character was pure and stainless, and that his house, his dress and his food were characterised by a rare simplicity. Furthermore, he describes him as being so unpretentious that he would receive from his companions no special mark of reverence, nor would he accept any service from his slave which he could do himself. Finally, that he was accessible to all and at all times, that he visited the sick, that he was full of sympathy for all, and that his benevolence, generosity and his anxious care for the welfare of the community were unlimited.

Besides the description mentioned above, various anecdotes depict a different Muhammad than the Muhammad that is portrayed by Islamic extremists and 'Islam-fearers' alike. As an example of an early display of tolerance and co-existence, I would point out that Muhammad allowed a Christian delegation (from around the area of Yemen) to pray *inside* the mosque of Medina. This is something that today would be unthinkable for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In the texts, we read that Ibn Ishaq said that Muhammad bin Jaʿfar al-Zubayr said that: "The (Najran) delegation came to the Messenger of Allah in Medina and entered his mosque wearing robes and garments after the Prophet had prayed the ʿasr prayer. They accompanied a caravan of camels led by

Bani al-Harith bin Kaʿb. The companions of the Messenger of Allah who saw them said that they never saw a delegation like them after that. When their time of worship came, they stood up to perform their worship in the Prophet's mosque. The Messenger of Allah said: 'Let them (worship)', and they prayed towards the east."

Gentleness and forgiveness, too, formed a central aspect in the way of service of Muhammad. We find this in, amongst other places, the following Hadith: Aisha narrates: "I was upon a camel which was misbehaving, so I began to strike it. The Messenger of Allah said: 'You must be gentle. Verily, gentleness is not in anything except that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything except that it disgraces it.'" (Ahmad, no. 24417)

His preaching in the valley of Taʾif, where people encouraged their children to throw rocks at him while he was preaching, reflects a gentle character. He was forced to leave, completely covered in blood, but did not complain to God. One of his companions relates in a Hadith: "The Prophet resembled those Prophets who were harmed by his people. He wiped the blood from his face and said: 'O God! Forgive my people, for they know not!'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 6929)

In the literature, we also read that Muhammad was not someone who swore, was rude or cursed people. When he wanted to reprimand someone, he said, according to the narration: "What is wrong with him? May dust be on his forehead!" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 5970) Moreover, contrary to the image that exists amongst many, none of the sources show that he ever hit any of his wives. On the contrary, Anas bin Malik, his servant, mentions: "He never reproached me. He never even asked 'why did you do that?' or 'why did you not do that?'" (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, no. 4773)

Muhammad's character in a very different fashion from what is today often the case. In my personal quest, Muhammad as a person and his character were a crucial matter. In the many books and articles that I began to restudy regarding this topic, an image appeared that required a further revision of my 'old' views on Muhammad's character. The description of Muhammad given by the eighteenth century German orientalist Dr. Gustav Weil, in his 'History of Islamic Peoples', is striking in this context. Even though he makes several unflattering remarks—in line with the anti-Islamic sentiment in the West—he also mentions a number of positive characteristics. He states that Muhammad set a shining example to his people, that his character was pure and stainless, and that his house, his dress and his food were characterised by a rare simplicity. Furthermore, he describes him as being so unpretentious that he would receive from his companions no special mark of reverence, nor would he accept any service from his slave which he could do himself. Finally, that he was accessible to all and at all times, that he visited the sick, that he was full of sympathy for all, and that his benevolence, generosity and his anxious care for the welfare of the community were unlimited.

Besides the description mentioned above, various anecdotes depict a different Muhammad than the Muhammad that is portrayed by Islamic extremists and 'Islam-fearers' alike. As an example of an early display of tolerance and co-existence, I would point out that Muhammad allowed a Christian delegation (from around the area of Yemen) to pray *inside* the mosque of Medina. This is something that today would be unthinkable for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In the texts, we read that Ibn Ishaq said that Muhammad bin Jaʿfar al-Zubayr said that: "The (Najran) delegation came to the Messenger of Allah in Medina and entered his mosque wearing robes and garments after the Prophet had prayed the ʿasr prayer. They accompanied a caravan of camels led by

Bani al-Harith bin Kaʿb. The companions of the Messenger of Allah who saw them said that they never saw a delegation like them after that. When their time of worship came, they stood up to perform their worship in the Prophet's mosque. The Messenger of Allah said: 'Let them (worship)', and they prayed towards the east."

Gentleness and forgiveness, too, formed a central aspect in the way of service of Muhammad. We find this in, amongst other places, the following Hadith: Aisha narrates: "I was upon a camel which was misbehaving, so I began to strike it. The Messenger of Allah said: 'You must be gentle. Verily, gentleness is not in anything except that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything except that it disgraces it.'" (Ahmad, no. 24417)

His preaching in the valley of Taʾif, where people encouraged their children to throw rocks at him while he was preaching, reflects a gentle character. He was forced to leave, completely covered in blood, but did not complain to God. One of his companions relates in a Hadith: "The Prophet resembled those Prophets who were harmed by his people. He wiped the blood from his face and said: 'O God! Forgive my people, for they know not!'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 6929)

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He also taught compassion for animals, contrary to what is unfortunately the practice today. There is a tradition in which Muhammad spoke about a man who saw a dog that so thirsty that he licked up sand. The man took one of his shoes and poured water into it in order to give it to the dog. He let the dog drink until it was no longer thirsty. God then blessed the man and forgave his sins (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 3467).

All in all, as Gustav Weil has already written, Muhammad lived a sober, calm and humble life. He also did manual labour and did not believe he was too good to milk sheep, repair his shoes and clothes and feed the animals. Furthermore, he did not eat much and often used a rough mat to sleep on. Before his death, he set free all of his slaves and divided the few possessions that he had. In his house, there was only some barley and in order to buy this he even had to sell his breastplate to a pawnbroker. These findings do not fit the image that I had of a plundering materialist tyrant. Muhammad, in terms of his character and manners in his daily life, was a particularly modest, humble and soft-spoken man. A man who lived up to the words he spoke.

I would like to conclude this chapter with a quote from the Christian expert of Islam, Montgomery Watt, which fits the opening quote from Thomas Carlyle about the distorted image of Muhammad's character:

His readiness to undergo persecution for his beliefs, the high moral character of the men who believed in him and looked up to him as leader, and the greatness of his ultimate achievement, all argue his fundamental integrity. To suppose Muhammad an impostor raises more problems than it solves. Moreover, none of the great figures of history is so poorly appreciated in the West as Muhammad.

"You do not see what you read, but seem to merely read what you want to see. The House of Islam is not that obscure barn next to it. It is not the place where blind critics and extremists reside. Step outside, into the garden, and behold the beauty of the House. Read and reconsider. Then ask your questions once more…"

What I recall from Professor Abdal Hakim Murad's response that stimulated me to 'look again' (2013)

7. Controversial Matters I

"And thus We have made you a moderate community…"
Quran 2:143

Montgomery Watt wrote: "To suppose Muhammad an impostor raises more problems than it solves." By now, this was my conclusion as well. Nevertheless, a sufficient number of events and theological matters did not seem to fit the earlier portrayed positive and bright character of the main Messenger of Islam. The most actual and concerning question was obviously related to the religious legitimacy of terrorist violence (by, amongst others, ISIS). In addition, questions remained with regard to abrogation, how Islam viewed the crucifixion and figure of Jesus, the position of non-Muslims, the age of Aisha [at the time of her marriage with the Prophet] and the formation of the Quran.

These are a couple of themes I sought answers to. Not only from within the literature, but also by writing to various experts in Islam, such as Professor Abdal Hakim Murad (Cambridge University). With his extensive clarification and explanation of religious and historical controversial matters (in relation to the different *madhhabs* as well), I gradually developed a new understanding of Islamic theology, and answers followed on numerous (yet) unanswered questions.

In the following paragraphs (and chapters), I will briefly reflect upon those findings that have brought me to this 'new' understanding.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, the West, especially recently, is being confronted with a religiously motivated, extremist form of Islamic violence. Within anti-Islamic circles—in which I have certainly played a reasonably assertive role myself— 'inflammatory and violent texts' found in the Islamic tradition are regularly referred to in this context. Some examples from the Quran are verses 8:12, 9:5 and 2:190-194. There also exist certain narrations from secondary sources such as the *'Sira Rasul Allah'* (a term that refers to the biographies of Muhammad written by Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham, amongst others) that are feeding critics and extremists and are used as evidence for the religious legitimisation of terrorism.

In these biographies, mention is made of the murder of a Jewish tribe (see also chapter 9, 'Hatred of Jews'), for example. This would be an example of the anti-Semitic character of the religion. Furthermore, this violent Islam would be the *only* and *true* form of Islam. According to this view, there are only Muslims who adhere to the 'total package'— including violent jihad, which forms an integral part of that package— Muslims who consciously 'cherry-pick' (or lie), and Muslims who are ignorant of their own religious tradition. In this way, Muslims are perfectly able to function within our Western society without negating the notion that there is only one Islam, which manifests itself solely through intimidation, violence and terrorism.

It is certainly true that the history of Islam, much like that of Christianity (see 'The Darkening Age' by classicist Nixey), has also been one of battle and conquest. Although this was primarily religious in nature with evangelism (*da'wa*) being an integral part of it in Muhammad's time, various invasions with a driving geopolitical component also characterised the era after this death. Think of Poitiers in 732 and Vienna in 1683, for example, where in fact the contrast between Islam and Christianity was less clear than often thought. For example, Protestant Hungarians fought alongside the Ottomans against the Habsburg Catholics.

To strike fear

The verses mentioned above and the decadent behaviour of certain historical Islamic leaders after Muhammad can—without knowledge of the context and without any explanation—easily be read as 'calls to violence'. There also exist, as mentioned earlier, passages from texts which various terrorist groups use in order to legitimise their propagated and displayed violence. The classical approach to these texts, Shaykh Al-Yaqoubi (author of 'Refuting ISIS', amongst others) explains, has always been within context and far removed from a simplistic literal interpretation, which is often the norm in many Salafi circles and is in fact a 'modern' deviation. It should not be a surprise that such a literal interpretation can be abused and is used to legitimise violence. Verse 8:12 states: "When your Lord inspired to the angels: 'I am with you, so strengthen those who have believed. I will cast fear into the hearts of those who disbelieved, so strike (them) upon the necks and strike from them every fingertip.'" However, as explained within traditional works of *tafsir*, this concerns a revelation with a rather extraordinary character. Its message is a call directed at the angels and not a command to people, believers or Muslims to commit certain acts of violence. Moreover, this verse was revealed during the battle of Badr. In this battle, the pagans of Mecca travelled for nearly two hundred miles in order to attack and annihilate the Muslims of Medina, who at the time were a rather small group. From the perspective of the Muslims, this was a matter of self-defence, even more so considering

that Muhammad and his followers suffered heavy persecution and torture in Mecca for no less than thirteen years. After they had fled this city and found security and shelter in Medina (called Yathrib at the time), they were confronted with yet another existential threat. Rumours spread that the Muslims were preparing an attack on the caravans of Abu Sufyan. Based on these rumours, the pagans of Mecca took measures to eliminate the Muslims permanently. To make matters more explicit, they then gathered an army of around a thousand men. When the Muslims heard of this, they decided to defend themselves pre-emptively with merely three hundred battle-ready souls. Miraculously, Muhammad and his men won the battle of Badr. In conclusion, with regard to the call to violence in the Quranic verse 8:12, it can be said that this was a revelation that was *not* directed at the Muslims, but rather at the angels. Its specific context was one of existential protection.

The verse of the sword

Another verse that is often cited as 'proof' that the Quran is a 'license to kill', and which I too have always considered as very telling of Islam, is the so-called 'verse of the sword' (9:5): "And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give alms, let them (go) on their way. Verily, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful." First, it is good to look at the context here as well. Besides verse 9:5, it is also important to mention verse 9:6: "And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety. That is because they are a people who do not know."

Verses 9:5-6 were revealed in their entirety at the end of the Medinan period and have a limited context. The hostilities that were ongoing at that moment had been 'paused' for a period of several months—an ancient Arab custom with regard to escalating conflicts—in which the various groups pledged not to engage in battle. Muhammad used this period to call various forces to join the Muslims, or, if they preferred, to leave the area that had initially been under Islamic rule. However, if these groups would resume their hostilities after the 'sacred months' passed, the Muslims would fight back.

It is quite remarkable, especially considering the ancient law of war, that even in this setting of battles and quarrels, revelation ends with emphasising the principles of forgiveness and mercy. In order to minimise hostilities, the Muslims were commanded to offer refuge, aid and shelter to anyone who sought it, even to those who belonged to enemy forces, as can be read in verse 9:6. This idea took shape in a more or less chivalrous fashion: the person who sought refuge would receive the message of the Quran, but was not forced to accept it. Then, he or she, regardless of his or her religion, would be led to safety. Furthermore, it is important to understand that the battle the Muslims were involved in at that time was a battle against the community that had robbed Muhammad and his companions of their homes and their possessions and had driven them out of their birthplace of Mecca, in this way forcing them to go to the 'unknown' Yathrib.

The call in verse 9:5—as was also the case with verse 8:12—concerned a defensive situation, was with an already existing enemy and was directed at groups that set on resuming the conflict even after the 'pause'. It should also be clear that the aforementioned commandments with regard to fighting were not applicable at an individual level, but were for the sake of preservation and defence of a new society and community, which was striving to bloom and thrive as a nation.

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Quran 2:190-194: "…and slay them wherever you find them…"

The last example that I would like to mention of a verse that supposedly reflects the violent message of Islam is verse 2:190-194: "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Verily, Allah does not love those who transgress. And kill them wherever you find them, and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and strife is worse than killing. And do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque until they fight you there. But if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers. And if they cease, then indeed, Allah is Forgiving, most Merciful. Fight them until there is no (more) strife and religion belongs to Allah. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors. (Fighting in) the Sacred Month is for (aggression committed in) the Sacred Month, and for (all) violations is legal retribution. So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you. And fear Allah and know that Allah is with those who are God-fearing."

It is quite remarkable that critics of Islam and Islamic extremists alike often tend to 'shop' when it comes to these verses. They base their simple but incomplete argument in favour of violence on a 'copy and paste version' of the sequence, and not the context in its entirety. Moreover, the fact is that this revelation took place at a time in which the Muslims of Medina were constantly under attack by the hostile Meccans and very violent 'acts of terror' were committed against the young Muslim community. During this period, a public crucifixion of one of Muhammad's close companions took place, Khubayb bin 'Adi. This exemplifies the great tensions and the extremely hostile climate that existed at the time.

The late Dr. Maher Hathout, an expert on Islam in the field of interreligious matters in the U.S., wrote the following regarding verses 2:190-194: "These verses applied to specific historical situations (or are applicable to a similar situation, if it would ever occur) where the entire Islamic community was threatened in its existence. It certainly does not concern a general call to fight or a call for violence against non-Muslims."

The history of Islam also shows that, in fact, fighting against aggressors was for a long time prohibited. It was only after thirteen years of service in Mecca and the emigration to Medina (the *hijra*) that a necessary change occurred. With the establishment of the Islamic (city)state at the time, the question arose how Muslims should defend themselves against the aggression of their external enemies.

The verses mentioned above were revealed in order to enable the Muslims to protect the newly formed (city)state by defending themselves against those who sought to fight them. The entirety of commands is therefore of a fundamentally defensive nature.

Ideology, terrorism and schools of law

The notion that Islam is a static ideology of terror is only sustainable when ignoring the context, rejecting the traditional views of warfare, and embracing the idea that 'Wahhabism' (or 'Salafism') is synonymous with Islam. At its core, the mentioned Salafism (as a denomination) finds its origin in the Wahhabi movement, which, under the leadership of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), sought to eliminate what it perceived to be religious innovations within the traditional discourse. This was to take place through a supposed return to Islam as

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understood by the *salaf* (predecessors), i.e. the first three generations after Muhammad. This aspiration forms the basic principle of Salafism to this day.

Islamic authority Al-Yaqoubi further categorises Salafism in the following way:

- Dogmatically, in this sense Salafism is an independent school of theology with Ibn Taymiyya as its major ideologue, and:
- Legally, in this sense Salafism opposes the four Sunni schools [*madhhabs*] of law [*fiqh*] (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali) and calls to recognise only the Quran and Sunna (the acts of Muhammad) as sources of law.

As a consequence of the latter, centuries of theological knowledge, interpretation and expertise are set aside, with all that results from it (see chapter 11 for a more detailed discussion on this topic).

Within traditional Islam, groups that challenge or no longer recognise religious authorities and become rebellious are historically known as *khawarij*. In Arabic, its etymological origin refers to 'leaving' or 'exiting'. Already in the early stages of Islam, these *khawarij* rebelled against the authority of the caliphs 'Uthman and 'Ali—and with it, against the transmitted teachings of Muhammad. The caliphs were eventually even murdered by this group. The opposition and aversion to extremists within the Islamic religion thus has a long history. It is believed that these deviations were prophesised by Muhammad himself. An often cited tradition of Muhammad (narrated by Abu Dharr) about these 'rebels' is as follows: "Verily, there will arise from my nation after me a group (of people) who would recite the Quran, but it would not go beyond their throats, and they would pass through their religion just

as the arrow passes through the prey, and they would never come back to it. They will be the worst among the creation and the creatures." (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 1067) Another tradition of Muhammad (narrated by 'Abdullah bin 'Amr) speaks of the excesses of these people: "...[they] seek the extremities of the religion, so much so that they will abandon religion..."

As pointed out in the introduction, there exist strong polemics in the Islamic world—despite the relative silence of Muslim communities in the West—with regard to the Wahhabi aberration. Al-Yaqoubi explains that the classical exegesis of the Quran—in accordance with the teachings of the four traditional schools of law—strictly prohibits 'random' and offensive aggression. One may not commit acts of aggression against innocent men, women, children, the sick, elders, monks, priests or anyone else who does not want to fight and kill. The followers of Muhammad were even instructed to preserve and respect plant and animal life and not destroy it. Mercy and justice ought to form fundamental ethical principles. Muhammad reportedly said in that regard (as narrated by Abu Dawud, no. 4941): "Those who show mercy shall receive mercy from the One Who is Merciful. Be merciful to those who dwell on earth, and He Who is in heaven shall be merciful towards you."

Radical forces within Islam seem to have no concern for these theological frames that teach a general tolerance, which transcends religious affiliation. Based on Al-Yaqoubi's categorisation of Salafism, it can be said that contemporary organisations such as ISIS adhere to the theology of Ibn Taymiyya *and* oppose the four Sunni schools of law [*madhhabs*]. In terms of *fiqh* (law), they only recognise the (literalist interpretation of the) Quran and Sunna. Established teachings, which are crystallised through the explanation and clarification of the Quran and Sunna by the greatest scholars of the past centuries, are rejected.

Interpretations without context and exegesis are the result. In order to understand the verses of the Quran and Hadith, knowledge of the historical context is necessary. Without knowing the circumstances behind the revelation, one cannot understand the verse, let alone apply it correctly. However, as we know, this unfortunately does happen. Professor Abdal Hakim Murad points to the confusion within many Islamic communities that has resulted from the growth and export of this theologically 'impoverished' Salafism. Finally, he also points to the Quranic command (verse 2:143, cited at the beginning of this chapter) to avoid extremism within one's faith and to strive for modesty and moderation.

Ibn Ishaq and his biography of Muhammad

Some less pleasant yet well-known stories about Muhammad and his companions can be traced to what is called the 'Sira Rasul Allah' (biography of Muhammad) of Ibn Ishaq (and later Ibn Hisham and others as well). Thus, we find the famous narration in which Muhammad is said to have tortured a certain person named Kinana with fire because he refused to tell him where a certain treasure was to be found. In the *Sira* of Ibn Ishaq, we read: "Kinana bin al-Rabi, the husband of Safiya, had been guardian of the treasures of Bani al-Nadir, and he was brought before the Prophet, who asked where they were hidden. However, Kinana refused to disclose the place. Then a Jew came who said: 'I have seen Kinana walk around a certain ruin every morning.' The Prophet asked Kinana: 'Are you prepared to die if we find that you knew where the treasure was?' He replied: 'Yes.' So the Prophet ordered the ruin to be dug up, and some of the treasure was found. After that, Kinana was asked again about the remainder, but he still refused to tell. The Messenger of Allah delivered him to Zubayr

al-'Awwam, saying: 'Torture him until he tells what he knows,' and Zubayr kindled a fire on his chest until he nearly died; then the Prophet delivered him to Muhammad bin Maslama, who struck off his head in revenge for his brother Mahmud." This is quite a shocking story that has partly determined my view of Muhammad. However, after further analysis of this story and the work of Ibn Ishaq in general, I came across various historical criticisms and narrations that contradict it.

First, the story above is diametrically opposed to the following narration (as mentioned by Professor Omar Suleiman in his article, 'How the Prophet Muhammad Rose Above Enmity and Insult'):

> On route to Badr, the Muslims were able to apprehend Quraysh's war-scout and bring him back to the Prophet. When the Companions began roughing up this man as they interrogated him for vital information, the Prophet hastened to finish his prayer and said: "You beat him when he is honest with you, and you leave him be when he lies to you?" Despite the fact that this person belonged to an opposing army, and that torture might reveal critical information about the enemy's points of weakness, he still intervened. Thus, when Imam Malik was asked: "Can a captive be tortured if it is hoped that he can reveal the enemy's points of vulnerability?" he said: "We have never heard of this [in our tradition]."

In the following event (also mentioned in Professor Suleiman's article), we do not see an example of torture or abuse either on the part of Muhammad:

> Following the Battle of Badr, the Muslims found Suhayl bin 'Amr—a chief of Quraysh and a vocal adversary of Islam—among the prisoners of war. 'Umar was delighted at a chance to exact revenge, and requested permission to remove Suhayl's front

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Ibn Ishaq and his biography of Muhammad

Some less pleasant yet well-known stories about Muhammad and his companions can be traced to what is called the *'Sira Rasul Allah'* (biography of Muhammad) of Ibn Ishaq (and later Ibn Hisham and others as well). Thus, we find the famous narration in which Muhammad is said to have tortured a certain person named Kinana with fire because he refused to tell him where a certain treasure was to be found. In the *Sira* of Ibn Ishaq, we read: "Kinana bin al-Rabi', the husband of Safiya, had been guardian of the treasures of Bani al-Nadir, and he was brought before the Prophet, who asked where they were hidden. However, Kinana refused to disclose the place. Then a Jew came who said: 'I have seen Kinana walk around a certain ruin every morning.' The Prophet asked Kinana: 'Are you prepared to die if we find that you knew where the treasure was?' He replied: 'Yes.' So the Prophet ordered the ruin to be dug up, and some of the treasure was found. After that, Kinana was asked again about the remainder, but he still refused to tell. The Messenger of Allah delivered him to Zubayr

al-'Awwam, saying: 'Torture him until he tells what he knows,' and Zubayr kindled a fire on his chest until he nearly died; then the Prophet delivered him to Muhammad bin Maslama, who struck off his head in revenge for his brother Mahmud." This is quite a shocking story that has partly determined my view of Muhammad. However, after further analysis of this story and the work of Ibn Ishaq in general, I came across various historical criticisms and narrations that contradict it.

First, the story above is diametrically opposed to the following narration (as mentioned by Professor Omar Suleiman in his article, 'How the Prophet Muhammad Rose Above Enmity and Insult'):

> On route to Badr, the Muslims were able to apprehend Quraysh's war-scout and bring him back to the Prophet. When the Companions began roughing up this man as they interrogated him for vital information, the Prophet hastened to finish his prayer and said: "You beat him when he is honest with you, and you leave him be when he lies to you?" Despite the fact that this person belonged to an opposing army, and that torture might reveal critical information about the enemy's points of weakness, he still intervened. Thus, when Imam Malik was asked: "Can a captive be tortured if it is hoped that he can reveal the enemy's points of vulnerability?" he said: "We have never heard of this [in our tradition]."

In the following event (also mentioned in Professor Suleiman's article), we do not see an example of torture or abuse either on the part of Muhammad:

> Following the Battle of Badr, the Muslims found Suhayl bin 'Amr—a chief of Quraysh and a vocal adversary of Islam— among the prisoners of war. 'Umar was delighted at a chance to exact revenge, and requested permission to remove Suhayl's front

teeth "so that he could never preach against the Messenger." However, the Prophet Muhammad said: "I will not mutilate him, lest Allah mutilate me—even if I were a Prophet."

Besides the fact that the story about the torture *by* Muhammad, from Ibn Ishaq, differs from the two mentioned narrations, the narration by Ibn Ishaq has no source either; its chain of narration [*isnad*] is faulty. Ibn Ishaq does not even name any narrators. That later biographies such as those of Ibn Hisham and al-Tabari also mention the event is merely the result of copying from Ibn Ishaq. Furthermore, despite being the first who wrote a comprehensive biography of Muhammad, the Muslim theologians of his time did not consider Ibn Ishaq to be someone who was very meticulous in collecting stories about Muhammad in his works, as they were not always reliable. Moreover, Ibn Ishaq was not an eyewitness and wrote his works around one hundred and fifty years after the passing of Muhammad, and often used the mythical stories of conquered peoples (in this case, the Jewish Banu Nadir). Consequentially, many stories or fables appear in his works that cannot be found anywhere else. A weighty example is his reading of Layla al-Qadr (the night of the first revelation). The story of Ibn Ishaq contradicts every Hadith regarding it; from al-Bukhari, Muslim and Abu Dawud, amongst others. For this reason, al-Bukhari indicated not to trust the writings of Ibn Ishaq.

Imam Malik—one of the greatest scholars of Islam and founder of the Maliki school of law—even called Ibn Ishaq an imposter and a liar. Malik maintained that he fabricated and spread false stories about Muhammad. The 'well-known' massacre of the Jewish tribe Banu Qurayza, in which Muhammad is said to have ordered the decapitation of six hundred to nine hundred men, is an example of this. That there has been a battle in which there were casualties is true according to various historical accounts. Because of their treason, waging war against the Muslims, and supplying the enemy with weapons, the military forces of the tribe in question—which had a non-aggression treaty with the Muslims but violated this—were killed (this too can be found in various Hadith from al-Bukhari and others). However, that this would regard nearly one thousand men—and according to some orientalist sources, women and children as well—cannot be found anywhere. Not in Christian sources, not even in Jewish ones; which is remarkable considering that the tribe in question was Jewish. Moreover, the fact that the story of Ibn Ishaq mentions that after having been defeated, the entire tribe of Banu Qurayza were brought to the house of Bint al-Harith (Muhammad's wife), makes it very improbable. We may assume that, with six hundred to nine hundred soldiers—including their wives and children—this would amount to around two thousand people. In one house. Houses of that size did not exist in Medina at the time.

The editor of Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad, Ibn Hisham, also mentions that he has left out many stories from the work of Ibn Ishaq due to the lack of evidence and reliable and sound chains of narration. Finally, even the infamous Islam-critic Robert Spencer, in his book 'The Truth about Muhammad', admits that "Ibn Ishaq's 'Life of Muhammad' is so unashamedly hagiographical that its accuracy is questionable." To me, these serious reservations place the stories in question that Ibn Ishaq wrote in a category in which, within Christianity, the 'Biblical apocrypha' belong.

Abrogation

As a continuation of the question regarding the interpretation, credibility and understanding of certain texts, I came across the principle of 'abrogation' early on in my studies. Within Islam,

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abrogation is the exegetic principle that earlier revealed revelations, which apparently contradict later revelations, were overruled or replaced by these later revelations. The Arabic term for this is *'naskh'*. Abrogation applies to rules and obligations, not to the fundamentals of creed. The Quranic basis for this concept can be found in verse 2:106: "We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, except that We bring forth (one) better than it or similar to it. Do you not know that Allah is over all things Powerful?" Well-known examples in this regard are the direction of prayer [*qibla*], which changed from Jerusalem to Mecca, and the consumption of alcohol, which was gradually prohibited.

Considering the Islamic claim that the Quran contains an eternal and unchangeable message, this idea greatly fascinated me. How does this notion of eternality and immutability relate to the principle that certain verses of a Divine origin can apparently be replaced? Dr. Jonathan Brown, in his book 'Misquoting Muhammad', distinguishes between two kinds of abrogation:

- a complete annulment of a previously revealed law;
- an adjustment or restriction of a previously revealed law.

At the margins—that is, amongst Islam-critics and Wahhabis—it is generally the existence of the first kind that is considered and reasoned from. This means that, in accordance with this reasoning, there are Quranic passages, which—once more without context, mind you—no longer apply in their entirety. An often cited example is verse 2:256: "There is no compulsion in religion…" This verse is said to be abrogated by the so-called 'verse of the sword' (9:5): "And when the Sacred Months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at

every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give alms, let them (go) on their way. Verily, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

A result of merely focussing on the first form of abrogation—by critics and Wahhabis—in addition to a lack of context, is described by Dr. Brown as the loss of moderation and completeness. After all, many later revelations (from the Medinan era) took place in a context of battle. If it is said that such a revelation, despite its context, abrogates previous revelations from periods in which there was no question of battle, then this does not do justice to day to day practice and to the second (classical) form of abrogation (mentioned by Dr. Brown). Moreover, there is no consensus on the explanation and interpretation of verse 2:106 (with regard to abrogation). In addition to the earlier given explanation with regard to abrogation—namely that later verses 'replace' earlier verses—there is also an interpretation that this verse refers to pre-Quranic revelations such as the Torah and the Gospel (between which, according to Christianity, there also exists a certain form of abrogation: fulfilment of the law by Christ). According to this understanding, the Old and New Testament have been abrogated completely by the revelation of the Quran.

In light of this topic, Professor Abdal Hakim Murad further mentions that:

> Muslim scholars are historically not united on the meaning and extent of abrogation within the Qur'anic text. There are some who deny its occurrence altogether, trying to deal with apparent changes in legal prescriptions using various concordist methods, holding that different verses referred to different contexts. The debate will probably not be resolved. However, the mainstream

view continues to be that there are (perhaps half a dozen) verses which are in the scripture which are eternally God's word, even though they applied in practice only to a very short period during the Prophet's ministry. (This does not apply to verse 2:256).

"This same Muhammad turned women into subhumans against whom all sorts of violence is permitted. He even made so-called Divine commandments out of various forms of violence against women. Dutch society is to be protected from and warned against Islamic teachings and the call to violence."

Text from a PVV bill submitted by myself, titled: 'Violence against women in Islam'

7. Controversial Matters II

"We have not sent down to you the Quran
to cause you any distress…"
Quran 20:2

Violence against women

It does not require a long introduction to assess that the position of women, in various ways, is less rosy in the Islamic world than it is in the West. Well-known and often cited examples are the farcical restrictions in Saudi Arabia. Think of women not being allowed to walk the streets by themselves or even to decide to travel, study or find a job. Neither does the dress code in public, as regulated by the state—to the minute details of colour even—portray much freedom of choice. Even outside the context of any particular Islamic country, we see many customs within Islamic communities that are unfriendly to women. Forced marriages and honour killings, for example, are practices that now have appeared in the Netherlands as well.

Even though these abuses do occur among non-Islamic groups as well, the over-representation of Muslims is a statistical fact. Forced marriages in the Netherlands predominantly occur amongst Turks, Moroccans, Somalis, Afghans, Pakistanis, Kurds and Hindustani Surinamese and Chinese (Movisie, 2009). Research shows that honour killings in the U.S., Canada and Europe take place exclusively among Muslims (Chesler, 2010). According to the most recent figures of the 'National Centre of Expertise for Honour-Related Crimes', more than five hundred instances of honour-related violence were reported in the Netherlands in 2014. This includes all forms of violence: from abuse to kidnapping to murder. As for the latter, this included 20 honour killings

in the Netherlands in 2014. Finally, the victims of honour killings and related violence are often Dutch women with a Turkish, Moroccan, Iraqi or Afghan background (NCEHRC, 2018).

That there are concerns—within the Islamic community as well as outside of it—about the position of Muslim women is not surprising in this regard. Pressing questions are naturally about solutions and causes. Considering the theme of this book, my focus here is on the latter question, and in particular, whether such violence against women originates in Islam. To put it differently, is the claim correct that Islam, broadly speaking, legitimises violence against women? This is a claim that, for a long time, I have conveyed with the utmost dedication, and which formed a large part of my aversion to Islam. To find a clear answer to that question requires knowledge of what the Islamic law and rulings are with regard to domestic violence. These questions directly address the autonomy and freedom of women, physically as well as mentally.

The Islamic perspective on this matter—and in fact all matters, which clarifies the importance given to the Quran and Sunna (the acts of Muhammad)—starts from the notion that man benefits from a framework revealed by God in order to fully fulfil his potential. These revelations have to be understood within the larger framework of commandments and instructions and, before anything else, have to lead to justice for all.

Looking at the commandments and reports regarding this topic, we read in verse 57:25 of the Quran that the Messengers were sent so that "the people may maintain (their affairs) in justice."

This clearly also means that, to God, there can be no distinction based on gender. Instead, distinction is based on deeds and intention. A different gender plays no role in this. Verse 3:195 explicitly states that there can be no difference between men and women as far as their deeds are concerned: "And their Lord responded to them: 'Never will I allow to be lost the work of (any) worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another.'"

We read in verse 49:13 that mankind is called to a virtuous life: "O mankind, verily We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing and well-Aware." Within marriage as well, there ought to be reciprocity and warmth. In the Quran, marriage is described as an institution based on love and mercy between husband and wife (verse 30:21): "And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses, that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you love and mercy. Verily, in this are signs for a people who give thought." It can even be said—based on several narrations—that women, in their role as mothers, are above that of men: "Abu Hurayra said: 'O Messenger of Allah, who amongst the people is most deserving of my good treatment?' He (the Prophet) said: 'Your mother, again your mother, again your mother, then your father, then your nearest relatives according to the order (of nearness).'" (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 2548b) During his entire life, Muhammad emphasised: "The best of you are those who are the best to their wives." (*Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, no. 1162)

These narrations seem to show a near-matriarchal outlook within Islam. However, this is not reflected in the earlier mentioned problems. Moreover, for me, the question remained how this in its entirety relates to, for example, verse 4:34, in which men are seemingly instructed to hit their wives: "But those (wives) from whom you fear arrogance, advise them, forsake them in bed, and strike them." In this verse, men are instructed to encourage their wives to change their behaviour when

there is a severe conflict. If this has no effect, they should no longer share beds. The *ultimate remedy* is described as 'striking'. This has been interpreted rather literally throughout the centuries and has caused much misery, and still does.

The late Aminah Assilmi (former chair of the International Union of Muslim Women) states that the literal and isolated interpretation of this verse is rather startling, considering that the interpretation of a particular text should always coincide with other texts (from the Quran and Sunna). In this regard, one may refer to verse 3:7: "It is He who has sent down to you, (O Muhammad), the Book; in it are verses (that are) precise—they are the foundation of the Book—and others ambiguous. As for those in whose hearts is deviation (from truth), they will follow that of it which is ambiguous, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation (suitable to them). And no one knows its (true) interpretation except Allah. But those firm in knowledge say: 'We believe in it. All (of it) is from our Lord.' And no one will be reminded except those of understanding."

The selective use of parts of the Quran in order to justify certain ideas or practices is considered a disease of the heart. Therefore, it is essential from an Islamic perspective to find a clarification that corresponds with the entirety of the teachings from the Quran, the Sunna and the context in question. She also points to the personal example set by Muhammad (the Sunna) and asks rhetorically in which cases he has ever hit a woman. From the Hadith of Muslim (no. 2328), one can conclude that this has never happened, as mentioned by Aisha: "The Messenger of Allah never hit anyone with his hand, neither a woman nor a servant…" Then there is the Hadith of Abu Dawud (no. 2144) in which Muhammad is rather firm in his rejection of domestic violence towards women: "…Do not hit them, and do not revile them." He also does not seem to have recommended it and pointed to

the psychological impact of such violence within marriage: "How can any of you hit his wife as he hits his camel, and then embrace her?" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 6042)

To interpret this matter 'in its entirety', as pointed out by Assilmi, is also certainly not a contemporary development. From the early days of Islam, it was proposed—and not by the least of them—to interpret verse 4:34, in light of the entirety of statements on the topic, allegorically, as in: to 'push away' or 'to express one's anger', in a non-physical sense towards the woman. For example, 'Ata' bin Abu Rabah, the famous narrator of Hadith and first Imam of Mecca, mentioned in this context: "A man does not hit his wife, he may only express his anger." It should be noted that 'Ata' was also someone who narrated the well-known Hadith—from his teacher, 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas (the cousin of Muhammad and one of the first scholars of the Quran)—that 'hitting' in this verse should be with a *siwak*, a small twig used for cleaning one's teeth. The explanation given here, amongst others by al-Tabari, is that this would explicitly be a symbolical act, which may not cause any pain, but purports to convey the severity of the situation.

That the practice of subordinating and beating women unfortunately continues to occur frequently is largely due to the very patriarchal and tribal culture in the region. This culture is subsequently brought to non-Islamic countries through migration. The culture that has historically developed—in which honour and shame are dominantly present as well—in which women have an inferior position, is subsequently religiously legitimised based on the isolated text of verse 4:34 (Ibrahim and Abdalla, 2010). Hadith such as Ibn Majah's (no. 1986), in which Muhammad said that a man "should not be asked why he hits his wife," are also cited in order to justify the abuse of women. This last Hadith, found in al-Nawawi's 'The Meadows of the Righteous' [*Riyad al-Salihin*],

is classified as 'weak' by Shaykh Ahmad Shakir amongst others, because its chain of narration does not fulfil the requirements.

What applies to beating women naturally also applies to related or graver abuses such as honour killings, which I referred to at the beginning of this chapter. Even though Islam is often seen as the cause of this problem, it is merely a legitimation that is sought for the act. In fact, honour killings revolve around a so-called 'honour code'.

In his book 'The Honour Code', philosopher Kwame Appiah researched what this honour code means within societies in which this concept continues to take a central place. In it, he looks at processes that have led to the development and termination of bizarre practices such as fatal duels in Great Britain and food binding in China. He concluded that these practices correlate to this 'honour code'. Appiah defines this code as 'a set of social norms and conventions that regulates who is to be honoured'. Furthermore, this code is part of a culture and with it a contributing factor to someone's vision *on* and acting *within* reality. Honour determines social functioning within the societies in question. He states that this fact makes comprehensible why abhorrent practices such as honour killings still exist. It is a collective principle that decides the course of one's life. When one's honour has been defiled, functioning within the family, neighbourhood, and even professionally, becomes very problematic. 'Removing' that which has defiled one's honour restores respect, which is crucial to one's social functioning. This is not limited to Islamic societies in which this abject custom still occurs.

Until 1975, it was still possible in France to be acquitted of murdering one's wife if she was caught in the act with another man. Such a murder was called a 'crime of passion'. The honour (and love) of the man were defiled and there existed a collective understanding of

his fatal reaction. So much so that this historical custom was even incorporated within the legal system. In Italy as well, the Criminal Code was not amended until 1981. Before that, a man who killed his wife, his daughter or even his sister because of 'unlawful sexual relations' could only get a prison sentence of three to seven years, where under different circumstances it could be a life sentence (Barazzetti et al, 2007).

Just as these 'honourable crimes of passion' in Europe do not find their origin in Christianity, honour killings do not find their origin in Islam. Even in a country such as Pakistan, where honour killing continue to occur frequently, there is a great resistance especially from religious (Islamic) circles. The Pakistani 'Sunni Ittehad Council' (SIC) even issued a *fatwa* in which it declared the practice of honour killings to be a great sin.

I would like to conclude this paragraph with a very sad story from the Islamic tradition that makes matters clear (as related by al-Qurtubi in his *Tafsir*, 6:140):

It has been related that there was a man from amongst the companions of the Prophet who was still grieving when he was with the Messenger of Allah. So the Messenger of Allah said to him: "What is the matter with you, what makes you so sad? He said: "O Messenger of Allah, I have sinned greatly in the age of ignorance [*jahiliyya*] and I fear that Allah will not forgive me even though I have converted to Islam." He (the Prophet) said to him: "Tell me about your sin."

He said: "O Messenger of Allah, I was of those who used to kill their daughters, and a daughter was born to me, and my wife intervened so that I would leave her be. I left her until she grew up and became one of the most beautiful women. I then arranged

for her to be married. But I became zealous, and my heart could not bear to give her in marriage, or to leave her alone in the house without a husband.

"So I said to my wife: 'I want to go to this or that tribe and visit those who are near in kin, and I will take her with me.' I explained it this way, and she dressed her up and beautified her. She made me promise not to deceive her. I went to the top of the well and looked into it. The young girl then realised that I wanted to throw her into the well, so she grabbed me and began to cry, and said: 'Father! What are you going to do to me?' So I was merciful towards her. Then I looked into the well and became zealous. She grabbed me again and said: 'Father! Do not lose my mother's trust!'

"I looked once more into the well, and once more at her, and I was merciful to her, until the devil overtook me and I took her and threw her head first into the well, and [as she fell] she called out from the well: 'Father! You have killed me!' I stayed there until her voice had disappeared, and then left."

[Upon hearing this] the Messenger of Allah and his companions wept, and he (the Prophet) said: "If I was commanded to punish anyone for what they did during the age of ignorance, I would punish you."

Was Jesus crucified?

A controversial matter of a completely different kind, but not unimportant, also considering my religious starting point, was the theological question regarding the Islamic view of the crucifixion and death of Jesus (the) Christ. Even though I could no longer embrace the Christian soteriological concept of Christ, the Islamic view of the event, to me, raised many questions. Within Islam, generally speaking, the

historical crucifixion of Jesus is not affirmed. At the same time, there exists a significant amount of source material, of Christian as well as non-Christian origin, which relates the story of the death of Jesus by crucifixion. Especially the presence of non-Biblical, sometimes even hostile, confirmations of the story of his death is something to be considered. I will present several relevant sources below.

A famous text is from Mar Bar Serapion, a Roman philosopher from (what was at the time) the province of Syria. In the year 73 CE—that is, forty years after his crucifixion—he spoke of "Jews… executing their wise king." In the work '*Antiquitates Judaicae*' (The Antiquities of the Jews), the Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus writes (in 93 CE): "And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease." The Roman senator Tacitus mentions the following (in 116 CE): "Christ, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome…"

The above sources, amongst others, have led to the widespread belief that the crucifixion of Jesus has historically taken place. I was aware that Islam views this differently. However, what was this different view based on and has this always been the case?

Dr. Todd Lawson conducted a research into the development of the view of Muslim exegetes with regard to the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Of main importance here is verse 4:157, which is notably the *only* passage in which the crucifixion is explicitly mentioned: "And their (the Jews') saying: 'Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah.' And they did not kill him, nor did they

crucify him; but (another) was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they certainly did not kill him." Based on this text, the Quran does seem to deny that Jesus was killed and crucified.

The view *on* and meaning *of* the death of Jesus is also the most crucial soteriological difference between Islam and Christianity. For Muslims, in the sense of redemption, it is not decisive. To put it differently, it is not part of the main tenets of faith. This is contrary to Christianity, in which denial of the crucifixion means denying a fundamental article of faith. That being said, both religions have more in common than they differ on with regard to Jesus. Both religions point to his miraculous birth, his mother Mary, the miracles he performed and his Ascension. Both religions even call him the Messiah. Finally, both Christians *and* Muslims await his return in the End of Days. This awaited return is agreed upon amongst those Muslims mentioned below as well, even though they sometimes follow an alternative or minority view with regard to the crucifixion. From either perspective, Jesus returns.

Throughout Islamic history, based on the verse (4:157) mentioned above, different theories have emerged with regard to the question of what then *did* happen to Jesus. Even though the diversity of theories is not limited to two, I will mention here the (currently) most relied upon doctrines. First, the 'theory of substitution'. This theory maintains that someone else was crucified instead of Jesus, who was taken unto the heavens. Second, the 'swoon hypothesis'. This theory maintains that Jesus did not die on the cross but survived these hardships and was taken unto the heavens at a later time. What connects these two theories—and this has become the general Islamic understanding—is that Jesus did not physically die before God took him unto the heavens.

However, the literal interpretation of verse 4:157, which has led to these two theories, is not unambiguous either. Dr. Shabir Ally and Professor Abdal Hakim Murad, for example, point out that in interpreting this verse, emphasis can also be placed on the word 'they'—which refers to the Jews—instead of 'did not kill'. Doing so, the verse would not state that Jesus was not killed (by crucifixion) but that 'they'—the Jews—did not crucify him (the Romans did). This way, in the Islamic narrative as well, the historicity of the crucifixion remains intact and completely fits the Quranic framework.

Dr. Ayoub, in the article 'Towards an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion?', takes it a step further and proposes that the absolute denial of Jesus' death, according to the view of several classical narrators as well, cannot be traced back to the Quran. However, this view is historically as well as contemporarily only supported by a minority.

As for the question of whether Jesus actually died—that is, temporarily, considering that all agree he will return—of importance is what is found in verses 3:55, 5:117 and 19:33: "(Mention) when Allah said: 'O Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you unto Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve, and make those who follow you (in submission to Allah alone) superior to those who disbelieve, until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me is your return, and I will judge between you concerning that in which you used to differ.'" (3:55)

Dr. Ayyub states that the word that has been translated here as 'take you' is *'mutawaffika'* in Arabic. The meaning of *tawaffa* is 'to take away and receive' (of someone's soul). In verse 5:17, this word reappears when Jesus says: "I said not to them except what You commanded me—to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. And I was a witness over them as long as I was among them; but when You took me up,

You were the Observer over them, and You are, over all things, Witness." Dr. Ayoub points out that in both verses it is clear that what is being mentioned is the taking away of Jesus, and considering that the word *'mutawaffika'* occurs more than twenty-five times in the Quran, each time referring to someone's death, he concludes that it cannot be ruled out that Jesus *did* die. Even more so considering that in verse 19:33 Jesus, as a child, explicitly speaks of his coming death; the general understanding of this, however, is that it refers to the period *after* his return. According to the Quran, he spoke miraculously from the cradle in defence of his mother against those who slandered her: "And peace be upon me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive."

Dr. Zahnister, in his book 'The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity', also points to the possibility of the death of Christ within the Islamic framework. He cites al-Tabari, amongst others, who stated that, according to Ibn 'Abbas—one of the companions of Muhammad and an early exegete of the Quran—'take you' in verse 3:55 means 'take you in death' (also found in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 14:149). He also points to Wahb bin Munabbih—who was of the *tabi'in*, the generation after the companions of Muhammad—who reportedly said: "God caused Jesus, son of Mary, to die for three hours during the day, then He took him up to himself." He then mentions al-Tabari once more, who relates from Ishaq bin Bishr the following: "God let Jesus die for seven hours." In final, Montgomery Watt relates regarding this matter from the famous Islamic scholar al-Mas'udi (tenth century) who wrote about "the death of Christ under (the Roman Emperor) Tiberius."

That the general understanding within Islam clearly teaches that Jesus *was not* crucified and *did not* die, according to Dr. Lawson, correlates with the apologetic work of the eighth century Christian Church Father John of Damascus, a Syrian priest. The oldest non-Quranic textual evidence that sheds light upon the Islamic denial of the crucifixion is from his writing. Dr. Lawson claims that John of Damascus in this text, which is seen as the first Christian polemic against Islam, deliberately emphasised this aspect—the denial of the crucifixion—as opposed to the denial that the Jews were responsible for it, in order to identify Islam, in the eyes of the Church, with the heretic doctrine of Docetism. This doctrine maintained that Jesus merely had a physical appearance, and was therefore only apparently crucified; it was someone else who was actually crucified instead.

Early Muslim exegetes would have then adopted this theory of substitution. In the Quran, and he refers to the late Morris Seale (a famed Jewish theologian), there is no mention of someone else having taken the place of Christ [on the cross]. "The Quran simply does not say enough on the subject to either confirm or deny the event." In his research into exegeses from the first three centuries of the Islamic tradition, Lawson concludes that the sources used to substantiate the theory of substitution were nearly all of a non-Islamic origin. One might consider this remarkable.

Even though the generally accepted interpretation within Islam is that Jesus—before being taken unto the heavens—did *not* die by crucifixion, there existed and continues to exist within the wider (historical) Islamic framework room for a broader understanding regarding the crucifixion and death of Christ. Especially for those who are seeking God and come from a Christian background or have some sort of affinity with the figure of Christ, the wide historical framework of Islam in this regard is positively remarkable. At least, that was the case for me.

One of the most frequently heard contemporary accusations against Muhammad is regarding his marriage to Aisha. It would supposedly prove his deviated, pathological and lustful character. That marriage between an adult and a minor clearly has no place in our modern contemporary society requires no further explanation. What does require an explanation is why such an insufferable marriage in our eyes, historically speaking—'then' and 'there'—was *not* offensive.

The main Hadith (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 5133) regarding this marriage states: "…the Prophet married her when she was six years old and he consummated his marriage when she was nine years old, and then she remained with him for nine years (i.e. until his death)." This is now hard to imagine, but marriages between two people with such a difference in age were not exceptional at the time; neither was the particularly young age of the wife. In his article 'Weddings and Marriage Traditions in Ancient Israel', Professor Lemos mentions that puberty was the benchmark in determining someone's maturity. For women, menstruation was the point at which she was considered sexually mature. According to Karen Armstrong—frequent speaker and expert on monotheism and Islam in particular—Muhammad and Aisha consummated their marriage after she reached puberty. In this regard, she refers to the Islamic historian al-Tabari: "Tabari says that she was so young that she stayed in her parents' home and the marriage was consummated there later, when she had reached puberty." Dr. Raven, too, confirms that within traditional Islam, just as in many other ancient cultures, the age of marriage began with puberty (Raven, 2008). This phenomenon was not limited to Arab culture, but was customary throughout the world.

Perhaps the most famous woman in history, Mary, the mother of Jesus—according to the 'Catholic Encyclopaedia—married Joseph at the age of twelve, who himself was eighty or ninety years old at the time. The English king John Lackland married in the year 1200, at the age of thirty-three, with Isabella of Angouleme who was twelve years old at the time. The Indian mathematical genius, Srinivasa Ramanujan—who discovered the 'taxicab numbers' within number theory—married in 1909 with Janaki Ammal when she was only ten years old (Bullough, 1990).

In the modern West, too, this was not an uncommon phenomenon. For example, in America before the eighteenth century, children married at the age of eight or nine (Syrett, 2016). A relatively well-known example (in American juristic circles) is that of Mary Hathaway (Virginia, 1686) who married at nine years of age with William Williams (Brewer, 2012). As for the juristic customs at the time, as bizarre as this may appear to you and me, Sir Edward Coke (a seventh century English jurist) stated that: "the marriage of girls under twelve was normal..." (Robertson, 2010) This notion is indirectly reflected in the critics of Muhammad throughout the centuries, as everything that could be used to defile his character has been used: from violence and materialism, to polygamy and sorcery. However, his marriage with the much younger Aisha was not included in the list of objections until the early twentieth century. Not until 1905 is there any mention of her age in Western criticisms. It was the British David Margoliouth, Professor of Arabic at Oxford University, who stated that their marriage was an "ill-advised union" (Margoliouth, 1905).

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Dr. Jonathan Brown states that it is a remarkable fact that the opponents of Muhammad—from those in Mecca, the earlier cited anti-Islamic priest John of Damascus (seventh century), the Benedictine bishop Matthew Paris (twelfth and thirteenth century), up to even

Voltaire and Gibbon (eighteenth century)—have never mentioned the age of Aisha as an argument against him. Considering the nearly thirteen hundred years in which criticism of this had not been mentioned, it was apparently nothing out of the ordinary. Another factor may be that the political element of certain marriages was much more common in past times than later on. In this regard, even Islam-critic Tom Holland remarked that Muhammad's marriage with Aisha was not of a sexual but a political nature (Holland, 2012).

The fact that today marriage and the appropriate age of marriage is viewed differently is also expressed in the minimum age for marriage worldwide, which is on average between sixteen and eighteen, in the Islamic world *too*. With the exception of Saudi Arabia (which does not have a minimum age to begin with), Sudan (puberty), Yemen and Kuwait (fifteen for women), all Islamic countries *formally* maintain a minimum age which corresponds with the average worldwide. In Malaysia, it even lies far above it, namely twenty-one. Of course, this does not negate the fact that clandestinely and locally there are still many girls married very young, especially in certain areas in Africa and the Middle East. There also continues to be a difference in the permitted age of marriage between men and women worldwide. Generally speaking, the age for women is globally (and in exceptional cases legally as well) always lower. This was even the case in the Netherlands until 1985.

Within the Islamic world, we fortunately see increasing developments to combat the existing deplorable state of affairs concerning child marriage. For example, in April 2017, an international congress took place in Indonesia in which (female) Islamic clerics adopted a resolution to ban child marriages completely. Furthermore, Ahmad Farouk Musa (director of the 'Global Peace Foundation' and the 'Islamic Renaissance Front' in Malaysia) states that the notion that

Islam approves of child marriages does not correspond with the spirit of the Islamic law. He maintains that Islamic rulings and laws should be applied based on *'maqasid al-shari'a'*. In defining this term, he refers to the fourteenth century jurist al-Shatibi who describes it as the reaching of good, benefit and well-being, and avoiding evil, pain and loss for the creation. These are higher purposes—aimed at improving the current situation—with regard to the general well-being of society. In conclusion, Dr. Musa notes that it should be clear that the historical age of marriage (puberty) in our times no longer fulfils the above described spirit of the law.

Finally, there exist different theories, which are very old and based upon the traditions, with regard to the marriage between Muhammad and Aisha, which state that she was much older than traditionally assumed. Al-Tabrizi wrote in the fourteenth century, as an introduction to his well-known collection of Hadith *'Mishkat al-Masabih'*, a number of biographical details of those persons who have narrated Hadith. He writes, amongst others, about Asma' (the eldest daughter of Abu Bakr): "She was the sister of Aisha, wife of the Holy Prophet, and was ten years older than her… In 73 A.H. (692 CE)… Asma' died at the age of one hundred years." If we assume that the above is correct, Asma' would have been twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old in the first year of the *hijra* (the migration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in the year 622). According to this interpretation, Aisha was seventeen or eighteen years old at the time, and fourteen or fifteen at the time of consummating the marriage.

Ibn Kathir, the classical exegete of the Quran, also cites this tradition. In the book 'Early Days' (based on *al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya*), we find that Ibn Kathir said: "Asma' died in 73 A.H. (692 CE) at the age of one hundred years. She was ten years older than her sister Aisha." This clearly implies the same as it does with al-Tabrizi. Furthermore,

the Hadith of al-Bukhari (no. 4876) also provides reason to assume that Aisha was older. It has been narrated that Aisha said regarding the revelation of *Sura al-Qamar*, that: "…it was revealed to Muhammad in Mecca while I was a playful little girl [*jariya*]." In 'The Bounteous Koran' of al-Khatib it is mentioned that this revelation took place in the year 614. If Aisha moved in with Muhammad in 623, when she was nine years old, then she would have been a new-born baby at the time of the revelation in question. However, the Hadith states that she was 'a small playful girl' (tr. Lane, 1863), which means there was a difference of several years. This makes her age at the time of consummation of the marriage to be thirteen or fourteen, and according to some—who maintain that *'jariya'* refers to the period between six and thirteen years of age—this was between the ages of fifteen up to twenty-two.

Apostasy

Historically, apostasy has been regarded as something more than merely no longer believing in one's religion. The term apostasy derives from the Greek term *'apostasia'* and translates as uprising, rebellion or separation. This term implies a break with a previous life and having an aversion to it (Coser, 1954). It is also a concept that exists in numerous (historical) religious traditions. For example, the Persian Empire in the third century had already implemented punishments for apostasy, and heavily persecuted Buddhists, Jews and Christians in an attempt to protect Zoroastrianism as the (binding) state religion (Urubshurow, 2008). In the Bible, we also find rules with regard to apostasy. In Deuteronomy 13:6-10, we read how those who abandoned 'faith in the true God' were to be treated in ancient Israel in accordance with the letter of the law: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine

own soul, entice thee secretly, saying: 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers. Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth. Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him. But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

In his article 'The Issue of Apostasy in Islam', Dr. Jonathan Brown explains that the classical Islamic view on apostasy [*ridda*] has certain similarities with the Jewish tradition. For example, the punishment for the apostate [*murtadd*] was death according to all classical schools of Islam (Sunni as well as Shi'a) and was understood to be a public and not a private matter. Brown further cites several Hadith upon which the nature of the punishment for apostasy is based. For example, al-Bukhari (no. 3017) narrates: "…If someone (a Muslim) changes his religion, kill him." Furthermore, Muslim (no. 1676) narrates the Hadith: "It is not permissible to take the life of a Muslim who bears witness that there is no god but Allah, and that I am the Messenger of Allah, but in one of the three cases: the married adulterer, a life for life (a murderer), and the one who leaves his religion (Islam) and abandons the community."

Why is the punishment for apostasy so severe? Does this not contradict the Quran, which teaches, as mentioned in verse 2:256, that there is no compulsion in religion? The notion that someone is sentenced to death because of what he or she believes is very far removed from everything that we are brought up with in the West:

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individual freedom, freedom of thought, freedom of expression and, evidently, freedom of religion. Dr. Jonathan Brown, an American convert himself, is of course familiar with the Western cultural aversion to this practice and the incredulity from the perspective of Christian culture. He states that the concept of apostasy was in its entirety historically far more complex than how a number of contemporary Islamic countries frequently understand and apply it. The identity of a community in those times was completely intertwined with religion. To abandon one's religion was therefore little different from abandoning the community (i.e. the country) one lived in. In times of war, conversion was therefore equal to treason or desertion. This also explains the very severe punishments that were traditionally implemented against those who took such a step.

We also see this kind of reasoning in Islamic history. The fifteenth century jurist Imam Ibn al-Humam, for example, wrote in his work 'Fath al-Qadir' (vol. 6, p. 72): "It is necessary to punish apostasy with death in order to avert the evil of war, not as punishment for the act of disbelief, because the greatest punishment for that is with Allah." The possibility of a death sentence for treason remains to be part of the law in various countries today, such as the United States in the West. The penalty for treason is thus: "Whoever, owing allegiance to the United States, levies war against them or adheres to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort within the United States or elsewhere, is guilty of treason and shall suffer death..." (18 U.S. Code, par. 2381). Besides the link with the principle of treason during wartime, there is also a link with public order. As soon as 'disbelief' (or the new religion) was publicly proclaimed, historically and based on the earlier described intertwined nature of religion and community, a situation developed in which there was a danger of disturbing social stability.

We therefore see, explains Dr. Brown, that the *public character* of apostasy has been very weighty in terms of convictions throughout history. To illustrate the public aspect (rather than the disbelief itself), he mentions as an example a Muslim from the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century who had converted to Christianity and became a monk, and was brought before court. When the man was offered coffee, he threw it in the face of the judge and began cursing Islam. The judge ruled that this man was insane and released him. Only after the convert in question, in the period afterwards, had insulted Islamic publically three times was he executed.

The importance of the public cause with regard to war is also reflected in the fact that many Islamic jurists did not categorise the topic of apostasy as being a part of criminal law, but as a part of international politics and 'dealing with rebellion' instead. Dr. Brown points to, amongst others, the fundamentally important work within the Shafi'i school 'al-Muhadhab', by the eleventh century scholar al-Shirazi. He also mentions several Hanafi jurists (such as Ibn al-Humam and Ibn al-Sa'ati) who maintain this categorisation. It is also remarkable that 'later' versions, as reflected in the four (Sunni) schools of law—with a framework and within the context of conflict and public order—remain not directly reflecting the personal example set by Muhammad. In this regard, Dr. Brown states that there is no evidence that Muhammad had ever executed anyone because of apostasy. In his work 'Apostasy in Islam: A Historical and Scriptural Analysis', Taha Jabir Al-Alwani also concludes that Muhammad never executed anyone because of apostasy or disbelief. Al-Alwani cites the Andalusian jurist of the eleventh century Muhammad bin al-Talla, who writes in his work 'al-Ahkam': "There is no reliable evidence that the Prophet ever executed anyone for apostasy."

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There is also the example of 'Ubaydullah bin Jahsh, a former companion of Muhammad who converted to Islam in Mecca, but became and remained Christian when the Muslims had to seek refuge in Ethiopia. Muhammad did not punish him and let him be. Al-Alwani also points to Imam al-Shafi'i, who wrote about the Muslims in Medina at the time of Muhammad who had left the faith (and came back to it later). They were not forced to convert back to Islam, and they were not killed either. This seems to be completely in accordance with what is mentioned in the Quran. After all, based on the Quran itself there is no worldly punishment for leaving the faith. Nowhere is there any mention of a punishment or sanction that human beings are to implement. In this regard, and besides verse 2:256 "There is no compulsion in religion", Shaykh Hamza Yusuf points to verse 5:92 "And obey Allah and obey the Messenger and beware. But if you turn away, then know that upon Our Messenger is only (the responsibility for) clear proclamation." Verse 18:29 is also rather explicit "…Whoever wishes, let him believe; and whoever wishes, let him disbelieve." Completely against my expectations, faith is mentioned as a matter of personal choice. At the end of the verse (18:21), we read about the judgement of God and not about a punishment that is to be implemented by human beings.

Despite the fact that countries such as Sudan and Afghanistan still have the death penalty for apostasy in general, we fortunately also see that within Islamic orthodoxy—even with a very controversial Shaykh such as al-Qaradawi—there exists a discussion regarding its applicability. Moreover, it is stated that it is not 'disbelief' itself that is punishable, but that apostasy is only an offence in a context of social destabilisation or treason. Dr. Brown mentions that al-Qaradawi compared the punishment for apostasy—in accordance with the previously mentioned classical understanding—with the modern crime

of treason. He explains that there exists no punishment for someone's decision to stop believing in Islam, considering that the Quran clearly states that "there is no compulsion in religion" (verse 2:256). "Only those who combine their leaving Islam with a public attempt to undermine the stability of the Muslim community can be punished for *ridda* (apostasy)."

Within our globalised world—as a consequence of mass migration as well as an increasing interdependence (the internet)—a completely new context has developed, which hardly knows any comparison in history and which clearly has consequences for how societies are organised, in the Islamic world as well. Closed societies, such as previously more often had been the norm rather than the exception and towards which classical legislation is geared, no longer exist (with the exception of only a few states). That is why there is a demand for means to preserve and maintain the existing order within this new and much more open world. Brown suggests that the purpose of the punishment of apostasy within Islamic Law [*sharī'a*] also related to the preservation of faith. When Islam, and with it the Islamic community, incurs damage due to this implementing of worldly punishments for apostasy—for which there exists sufficient traditional ground *not* to implement it when it does not concern a situation of war—one might wonder why this is still being continued.

The context I found within the historical reading of Islam and the response to the question of apostasy clarified the whole of the matter to me for the first time and made it understandable within the context of that time. Finally, the texts from the Quran and most certainly also the example set by Muhammad offered me a positive answer to the question of whether there exists any room for individual freedom of belief within the 'House of Islam'.

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Despite the fact that countries such as Sudan and Afghanistan still have the death penalty for apostasy in general, we fortunately also see that within Islamic orthodoxy—even with a very controversial Shaykh such as al-Qaradawi—there exists a discussion regarding its applicability. Moreover, it is stated that it is not 'disbelief' itself that is punishable, but that apostasy is only an offence in a context of social destabilisation or treason. Dr. Brown mentions that al-Qaradawi compared the punishment for apostasy—in accordance with the previously mentioned classical understanding—with the modern crime

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9. Hatred of Jews

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Throughout the ages, various passages from the New Testament have been used to justify persecution of Jews. An example of this we find in Matthew 23:34-26, in which Jesus says to the Jewish leaders: "…and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge (torture) in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation."

In Matthew 27-24-26, we find the basis for the accusation that Jews have killed God—after all, from a Christian perspective, Jesus was God in the flesh: "When Pilate (the Roman prefect of Judea at the time of emperor Tiberius) saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made (by the Jewish population of Judea), he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying: 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See to it.' Then answered all the people, and said: 'His blood be on us, and on our children.' Then he (Pilate) released Barabbas (the murderer) unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified."

Partially based on these texts and the earliest disputes between the Church Fathers and the rabbis who were accused of deviance and not accepting the Messiah, the (Catholic) Church has excluded, persecuted and marginalised the Jewish community for centuries. Dr. Greenspon, amongst others, points out that the Church considered the Jews, *collectively*—formally until the Second Vatican Council in 1962—to be the murderers of God (Greenspon et al, 2000). As the Church became more powerful, more institutionalised persecutions followed. Before

the first crusade (1096), massive pogroms took place in the Rhineland cities (in today's Germany) in which thousands of Jews were massacred in the name of defeating all 'disbelievers'. This later became known as the first great persecution of the Jews [in Europe]. Furthermore, Jews were forbidden from possessing land, holding public functions and working within most guilds. This is how many ended up in the free sector: business, banking and commerce. When they proved being successful in these trades, this then lead to envy and stories about money and power hungry Jews who conspired against Christians. One of the accusations from the later medieval period was that Jews had poisoned the wells and were therefore responsible for the plague. They were also accused of using the blood of Christian infants for their religious rituals. Nevertheless, many believed these bizarre accusations, which led to more extreme violence and persecution. First, by forcing Jews into ghettos. Then, by massive expulsion from France, England, Portugal, and parts of Germany and Spain, amongst other places.

In 1517, a young Martin Luther (the initiator of the Reformation and with it, the later Protestant Church) thought that Jews were not to be persecuted, but that tolerance would lead to their conversion to Christianity. He even explicitly criticised the Roman Catholic Church on this point. When it became clear to him that the Jewish community would not convert, his mild tone changed into hatred, says Robert Michael in his book 'Holy Hatred'. Luther advised what should happen to the Jews [in his work 'On the Jews and their Lies', chapter 11]:

What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? …First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them.

…Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. …Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them. Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. …Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. …Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. …Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an axe, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow… Therefore, in any case, away with them!

Partially because of these notions and events mentioned above, a fertile ground developed for the later rise of the Nazi-ideology and eventually the holocaust, in which millions were killed (Berger, 2002).

That Christianity, or rather the practical adherence to it throughout history, has been *a* cause of the enormous suffering of the Jewish people should be clear. However, Jesus himself, of all things a faithful Jewish man, has naturally never proclaimed the anti-Semitic message that the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Protestant Church later conveyed to the 'flock of believers'. The previously cited Biblical texts do indeed not refer to the Jewish people as a whole, but only to a specific group of Jewish religious scholars (the Pharisees) and the 'internal enemies' of Jesus' message. Does the fact that the central figure [of Christianity] conveyed a different message than what later followers practised render the religion anti-Semitic? Or is the central figure to remain the starting point? My opinion is that the latter should apply. Before I will analyse the personal message and example set by

Muhammad with regard to his interaction with the Jewish community, I would first like to discuss a number of 'controversial' narrations and verses.

Does Islam teach hatred of Jews?

A well-known Hadith (*Sahih Muslim*, 2922) that is considered anti-Semitic by those who do not know the context, states: "The last hour will not come until the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims will kill them, until the Jews will hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and the stone or tree would say: 'O Muslim, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him…'" Without any context, this is a very extreme (and alienating) text that seems to leave little room for nuance. That is why both critics and so-called 'hate imams' cite it this way. However, this concerns a passage from a much larger eschatological whole. It is a part of an Islamic description of the apocalypse (the End of Times and the Day of Judgment), in which a battle will take place between Jesus (the Messiah) and the Antichrist (the Dajjal).

Professor Suleiman and Dr. Khan of the Yaqeen Institute say that this battle is in fact not *about* or *between* religions, but is a written account of the eventual war between good and evil. They further state that all righteous Christians, Jews and Muslims, will follow Jesus when he returns: "And there is none from the People of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in Jesus before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness." (Quran 4:159) People will unite (under one creed). However, besides unbelievers and disbelievers, deviant Christians, Jews *and* Muslims will follow the Dajjal. The Hadith that describes the soldiers of the Dajjal who are Jewish refers specifically to a Jewish unit of seventy thousand men who will

make the Dajjal their Messiah and will follow him (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 2944). This Hadith (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 2922), then, is not explicitly about *all* Jewish soldiers or the Jewish people as a whole. In various commentaries on the Hadith in question (such as '*Fayd al-Bari*' by Shaykh Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri), it is also pointed out that the Jewish followers of the Dajjal are merely a small group. By far, most Jews, Muslims and Christians will belong to the 'righteous camp' and will fight the Dajjal. The rocks and trees that (metaphorically) point out the hidden group do not point out random Jewish bystanders, but the (seventy thousand Jewish) soldiers from the army of the Antichrist, the ultimate evil.

That the religious identity [of these soldiers] is not of a primary importance also becomes clear when we look at other Hadith regarding the same event. In variant narrations, we find that the stones and trees will say: "Here is a rejecter of truth hiding behind me," (Ahmad, 3546) or: "Here is a follower of Dajjal" (al-Safarini, *al-Buhur al-Zakhira fi-'Ulum al-Akhira*, 1:493). By placing the above Hadith within the greater context, it quickly becomes clear that this is not a matter of anti-Semitism.

The same applies to certain verses of the Quran that are related to each other, which some consider to be anti-Semitic: 'the Jews' would be apes and swine, a people accursed by God. Even when not explicitly mentioned, it becomes clear from the text that this refers to the 'children of Israel'. Verse 2:65 states: "And you had already known about those who transgressed among you concerning the Sabbath, and We said to them: 'Be apes, despised.'" Verse 5:60 states: "Say: 'Shall I inform you of (what is) worse than that as penalty from Allah? (It is that of) those whom Allah has cursed and with whom He became angry and made (some) of them apes and pigs…'" And finally, verse 7:166: "So when they were insolent about that which they had been prohibited

from, We said to them: 'Be apes, despised.'" Dr. Shabir Ally explains that the verses in question, contrary to what is commonly claimed, are not about the curse of the Jewish people. These verses very clearly relate to a faction—"those amongst you" and "(some) of them"—of the Jewish community.

Furthermore, in the books of *tafsir*, the controversy is not about any religious identity, but about the punishment that resulted from the aversion to God's commands. The literal interpretation of what followed is historically dominant. However, in the translation and commentary of the Quran by Yusuf 'Ali we read about how Mujahid, a *tabi'i* and student of Ibn 'Abbas (a companion of Muhammad) understood this text. Mujahid was of the opinion that this did not refer to a literal transformation of humans into apes and swine. He spoke of the development of a character with animalistic traits, and people who behaved amorally, following their basic instincts as if they were animals. A contemporary equivalent would be the term 'pig' or 'swine' when someone behaves in an objectionable or obscene way. Coming back to the previous point, this did not refer to 'the' Jews, but to specific violators of the law within the mentioned group; in the same way Jesus spoke of a specific group, and not the people as a whole.

With the development of Christianity, the message of the founder was often easily expressed in a way that was diametrically opposed to what he preached, while Biblical texts were detached from their context, resulting in almost an entirely new doctrine. Similarly, the latter era of the lived experience of Islam was often political in nature, especially in terms of policy.

For its followers, earthly and profane matters sometimes seemed to carry more weight than the theology of the teacher. Despite the fact that Jews enjoyed relative freedom under Islam—especially compared

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to the Christian Europe of that time—there have been examples of deviant leaders throughout history who treated the Jews like second-rate citizens.

Ahl al-dhimma

When it comes to the treatment of Jews—and non-Muslims in general—the concept 'ahl al-dhimma' is very relevant under Islamic rule. Within an Islamic context, religious minorities are known as 'dhimmis', short for 'ahl al-dhimma', which means 'people of protection'. In his work 'Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire', Dr. Levy-Rubin mentions that this is in fact short for 'dhimma Allah wa-Rasulihi': the 'protection of God and his Prophet'. This had therefore primarily a theological basis, which, however, quickly faded into the background due to its practical implementation. Practically speaking, it meant that Jews and Christians, along with a number of other religious groups, enjoyed a special status within the Islamic state. Generally speaking, this meant that their safety was guaranteed, that they were not required to enlist in the military and that they could continue to live by their own religious traditions. On the other hand, this required from them the payment of a fixed amount of money, the 'jizya'. This system was a new phenomenon at that time in that region and was considered relatively tolerant, especially compared to the circumstances within the Roman Empire, where long before that Christians had been persecuted. According to both Professor Griffith in his work 'The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque', and Professor Saliba in his article 'Christians and Jews under Islam' (2008), this does not negate the fact that serious persecution, exclusion and discrimination of minorities occurred as well and continues to occur, partially legitimised by this system.

In this way, according to predominantly non-Islamic sources, the caliph 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz—not to be confused with 'Umar bin al-Khattab, the senior companion and second caliph—introduced around 717-720 many restrictions for, amongst others, Christians and Jews. For example, in accordance with security regulations at the time, these groups were not permitted to wear green clothing (the colour of Islam), ride horses, carry arms, or receive the greeting of peace [assalamu 'alaykum]. They were also required to wear a distinguishing necklace with a plate or a bell and were not allowed to testify against Muslims, while their homes were required to be always lower than those of the Muslims. The colours yellow for Jews and blue for Christians (as signs of recognition) originate with the caliph in question.

The late Dr. Sakr (2005), however, also points out that this figure in particular is very much respected within the Islamic tradition because of his just rule. Under his leadership, Jews and Christians were part of the state apparatus as high-ranking officials. It was also this same caliph who, besides mosques, protected Jewish and Christian places of worship against, notably, Muslim groups who had appropriated the ground these churches and synagogues were built on. Dr. Sakr discusses an event in which a number of Muslims appropriated a church in order to expand the Great Mosque of Damascus (the Umayyad mosque). Caliph 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz then ordered them to dismantle that part of the mosque and restore the demolished church.

Less positive stories exist about the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim (926-1026), who was known for his cruelties against Jews and Christians. In 1009, he even destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which was constructed on the location where, according to Christianity, Jesus was crucified, buried and rose again. Less known is that he also destroyed synagogues in Syria, the Palestinian part of his empire and Egypt. In

to the Christian Europe of that time—there have been examples of deviant leaders throughout history who treated the Jews like second-rate citizens.

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Fez, in 1033, six thousand Jewish men were murdered, their possessions taken and their wives taken away (Husain, 2018). Throughout the Islamic world, there have been anti-Jewish excesses at later periods as well, although never on the scale and with the intensity that we have seen in Europe. This is largely because of the theological difference in how other religions, including Judaism, are viewed.

The late Professor Bernard Lewis stated that: "Stereotypes regarding Jews throughout most of Islamic history were different from European antisemitism because, unlike Christians, Muslims viewed Jews as objects of ridicule, not fear." He argues that Muslims did not ascribe a 'cosmic evil' to Jews, but that they were rather the target of mockery and ridicule. According to Lewis, this drastically changed with the establishment of the state of Israel. From that point onward, the historically European anti-Semitism began to become a part of the Islamic vocabulary. In contemporary Arabic media, we now often see—usually in response to a news item about Israel—plenty of old (European) Jewish stigmas. Fear dominates. Jews are now portrayed as cunningly seeking to accumulate money and power. Jews would conspire against non-Jews, they would use non-Jewish blood for religious rituals, and they are even being called the 'killers of Christ' as mentioned by Professor Jansen in his book 'From the hatred of Jews to suicidal terrorism'.

Muhammad and the Jews

The Jews, despite the often collective second-rank position, had many freedoms under the Islamic authority that were unheard of elsewhere. For example, social participation did not limit itself to sectors in which one (in Europe) 'had to' work because of being excluded from other sectors. In the Islamic world, Jews also filled

prominent positions within the public sector. The famous Jewish physician and philosopher Maimonides of the twelfth century, who was the personal physician of the similarly famous leader Saladin, is a good example of this.

Not very well known, but certainly worth mentioning, is the fact that Sultan Bayazid II sent his Ottoman (Turkish) flotilla to Spain in 1492 in order to rescue the Jews that were being expelled *as well as* the Muslims. He then granted them permission to settle in the Ottoman Empire, become Ottoman citizens and become of service to the Empire wherever possible. He ridiculed the behaviour of the Spanish rulers (Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile) by pointing out the absurdity of deporting people that were of such great benefit to their country. He said: "You venture to call Ferdinand a wise ruler… he who has impoverished his own country and enriched mine," as we read in the 'Jewish Encyclopaedia' by Singer.

Finally, an extraordinary man to mention in this regard is the Jewish Samuel Pallache. He was the first *chargé d'affaires* (diplomatic representative) of Morocco in the Netherlands (then still 'The Republic') and responsible for the very first trade agreement between a European and a non-Christian country. In the work 'Poetry, Politics and Polemics', Ed de Moor states that this agreement was established in the year 1610, after negotiations with, amongst others, Prince Maurice (the brother of William of Orange).

With regard to Morocco, it is interesting to note that up to just after World War II, it had the largest Jewish community of all Islamic countries in the world. The fact that hardly any Jewish citizens of Morocco were deported to the European extermination camps had

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much to do with the attitude of Mohammed V, the Sultan of Morocco at the time. When the rulers of Nazi Germany asked about the Jewish inhabitants of his country, he responded that only Moroccans lived in Morocco.

The fact that, throughout the centuries, the Islamic world had a rather ambivalent attitude towards the Jews has everything to do with the first framework as an example within Islam: the Constitution or Charter of Medina. This charter legislated the affairs between the Muslims and a number of other groups in Yathrib (the later Medina), their security and certain basic taxes. There are three remarkable articles contained in this charter that are specific to the Jews (see also Serjeant, 1964):

- Jews that followed the believers would be assisted and treated equally.
- No Jew would be treated unjustly on account of his religion.
- The enemies of those Jews who followed the believers would not be assisted.

There is no sign of any hatred of Jews that is intrinsic and instructed by Muhammad to be found here. On the contrary, numerous events from the life of Muhammad do not portray an anti-Semitic image either. Often times, practically as well as theologically, a 'common ground' was sought. First, the Quran states that kosher food (i.e. prepared by Jews) is permitted for Muslims to consume. Naturally, Islam also proclaims to bring a message that is rooted in the Jewish tradition and refers to Jewish Prophets such as Moses, David and Solomon.

The following Hadith similarly shows no trace of the hatred of Jews that we all too often hear about and see nowadays, and which is unfortunately legitimised by ascribing it to Muhammad. Wrongly, as we will read. Once, one of Muhammad's companions asked him why he stood up for a funeral procession of a deceased Jewish man. In this context, it was unusual to stand up for anyone outside of one's own clan or group. Muhammad responded that we were all equal in death. The Hadith of Muslim (961) is as follows: "…While Qays bin Sa'd and Sahl bin Hunayf were both in Qadisiyya, a funeral procession passed by them and they both stood up. They were told that it was the funeral procession of one of the people of the land (who were non-Muslim). They said that a funeral procession passed before the Prophet and he stood up. He was told that he (the dead man) was a Jew. Upon hearing this, he remarked: 'Was he not a human being, or did he not have a soul?'"

That Muhammad explicitly expressed his appreciation towards the Jewish tradition and its Prophets—and that Jews ought to be proud of this—becomes clear in the following Hadith (about two of the Prophet's wives): "It reached Safiyya that Hafsa said: 'The daughter of a Jew', so she wept. Then the Prophet went to her while she was crying, and he said: 'What makes you cry?' She said: 'Hafsa said to me that I am the daughter of a Jew.' So the Prophet said: 'You are the daughter of a Prophet, your uncle is a Prophet and you are married to a Prophet, so what is she boasting to you about?' Then he said: 'Fear Allah, O Hafsa.'" (*Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, book 46, no. 3894)

Contrary to the earlier discussed regulations of caliph 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz, non-Muslims (here, Jews in particular), according to the Sunna (the example set by Muhammad), *are* allowed to receive the greetings of peace. It has been narrated that: "The Prophet passed by a mixed gathering of Muslims and Jews, and he greeted them with peace

['peace be upon you': *assalamu 'alaykum*]." (*Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, book 40, no. 2702) It has also been narrated that: "The Prophet passed by a mixed gathering of people, amongst them Muslims, polytheists and Jews and he greeted them with peace." (*Riyad al-Salihin*, book 6, no. 868) This corresponds with the message from the Quran (4:86), in which can be read: "And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet (in return) with one better than it, or (at least) return it (in a like manner). Indeed, Allah keeps of all things account."

The often-heard notion in Islam-critical as well as Wahhabi circles—each for their own reasons—that Muslims should not greet Jews and Christians (or any other kind of non-Muslims) in the way Muslims give greetings amongst themselves (which was also my understanding), is usually based on the following Hadith: "The Prophet said: "I will ride to the Jews tomorrow. Do not give them the greeting first. If they greet you [with 'peace be upon you'], then say: 'and upon you.' (*Adab al-Mufrad*, no. 1102) It has also been narrated: "Do not greet the Jews and the Christians before they greet you, and when you meet any one of them on the roads, force him to go to the narrowest part of it."

At first sight, these Hadith give the impression that Muhammad wished to marginalise the Jews. However, based on additional sources, the context becomes clear. The phrase 'I will ride to the Jews' indicates that a battle was about to take place. They were in a state of conflict. That this statement does not regard everyday life and general interaction, but was made in the context of war, also follows from the categorisation of the Hadith by various classical scholars. The ninth century Persian scholar al-Tirmidhi, for example, placed the Hadith in question in the category of 'military expeditions', while fifteenth century Shafi'i scholar Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani placed this Hadith in the category of 'jihad'. This did not suggest any general hostility. On the contrary, as

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previously mentioned traditions show, this was regarding a very exceptional situation, namely war, which within the Islamic framework gives cause for being reluctant within one's personal affairs.

The final tradition that I will name in this chapter reflects a generally positive attitude on the part of Muhammad towards the Jews as well as towards the neighbour and those near in a broader sense. It may contribute to our understanding that Wahhabi or certain Islam-critical views are of a very selective kind: "'Abdullah bin 'Amr had a sheep slaughtered for his family, so when he came he said: 'Have you given some to our neighbour, the Jew? Have you given some to our neighbour, the Jew?' I heard the Messenger of Allah say: '(The angel) Gabriel continued to advise me about (treating) the neighbours so (kindly and politely), that I thought he would order me (from Allah) to make them heirs." (*Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, no. 1943)

Based on a further analysis of the claim (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) that Islam is inherently anti-Semitic, I cannot but conclude that there certainly are anti-Semitic tendencies amongst Muslims and that there are various historical examples of Islamic hatred of Jews and even severe persecution. However, the past also offered the Jewish community space and freedom of a kind that was unthinkable elsewhere. What struck me the most, and in fact astonished me, was the demeanour of Muhammad and his personal example, which many times is diametrically opposed to later Islamic ideas and regulations implemented by leaders. The often omitted—and sometimes equally hard to find—historical context is crucial in order to understand certain statements. Examples of supposedly anti-Semitic incidents, traditions and revelations with regard to Muhammad often completely lose such an anti-Semitic character when placed within their proper context. Muhammad was not an anti-Semite or a hater of Jews.

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In conclusion, and in accordance with what has previously been mentioned, Professors Goitein and Cahen, experts in the field of, amongst other things, historical anti-Semitism within the Islamic world, state that while anti-Semitism in Muslim countries certainly exists, that it has no factual grounding in the Quran or the Sunna.

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"…But, strangely enough, we find a Quran on the desk of the Chairman. This book forms the foundation of the anti-Semitic, homophobic, misogynistic and violent ideology that we know as Islam. The message of violence and subjugation is diametrically opposed to our freedom and democracy. It even endangers it. As far as we are concerned, such a book does not belong in a place at the heart of our democracy. On behalf of the Party of Freedom, I therefore say: Out with this Quran… Will the Presidium remove the Quran from the Parliament? If not, then I consider submitting a motion on this point (in order to take care of it that way)."

**My input in the Dutch Parliament
(Financial Projections 2013)**

10. The Quran

"He (Muhammad) is a Prophet and not a poet, and therefore his Quran is to be seen as a Divine law and not as a book of a human being, made for education or entertainment."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Quran, *the* foundation of the Islamic faith, was revealed to Muhammad over a period of twenty-two or twenty-three years (609/610-632). The first revelation, briefly described in chapter 6, was naturally also the beginning of his service. After receiving the revelations, Muhammad recited them to his companions who memorised the message and/or wrote it down. Before the Quran was completely collected in its finalised written form by Zayd bin Thabit under the caliph 'Uthman, the primary means of preservation was oral transmission. The Quran continues to be memorised until this day, and such a person who has memorised the Quran is called a '*hafiz*'.

The historical reason for collecting the text was the large number of '*qurra*'' (reciters) killed during the Battle of Yamama in 633. In a Hadith from al-Bukhari (no. 4986), we read about the underlying concerns: "…Abu Bakr then said (to me, Zayd bin Thabit): "Umar has come to me and said: "Casualties were heavy among the *qurra*' of the Quran on the day of the Battle of Yamama, and I am afraid that more heavy casualties may take place among the *qurra*' on other battlefields, whereby a large part of the Quran may be lost. Therefore I suggest, you (Abu Bakr) order that the Quran be collected." The eventual codification that took place, driven by this concern regarding its preservation, resulted in the same Quran that continues to be read today (Saleem, 2010).

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Due to my studies, but also my Christian background, I was familiar with the general outline of the history of Christianity. I was also familiar with the many earlier mentioned councils, the Apocrypha (Christian books which, for various reasons, were not included in the Bible), discrepancies between stories in different books of the Bible *and* the period between the events and their documentation. Therefore, the codification of the Quran was of great interest to me in my, by now, more tailored quest to find God. From my college years at the Free University (in Amsterdam), I had gained a basic familiarity with the history of the Quran. I wondered what the specific differences between the Bible and the Quran were in terms of canonisation, and not just broadly speaking. Below are some of my findings and related matters that I found remarkable in this case.

Canonisation, authorship and contradictions in the Bible

The Bible has various authors, some of whom are known while others remain unknown. It was written over a period of 1600 years and its eventual canonisation required centuries to be completed. Despite the long period, this has not lead to uniformity. For example, the Bibles used in the Roman-Catholic Church, the Protestant Church and the Eastern-Orthodox Churches differ from one another. The Bible of the Roman-Catholic Church contains seventy-three books, as opposed to the Bible of the Protestant Church, which contains sixty-six books. The Roman-Catholic version of the Old Testament contains the 'additional' (deuterocanonical) books Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach, Baruch and 1 and 2 Maccabees. Furthermore, some books contain additions that are not included in the Protestant Bible. We also see that within the Eastern-Orthodox Churches, the Ethiopian branch has included the 'additional' book Acts of Paul, while the Assyrian

Church does not include a number of books in its Bible that are generally accepted within the Church: 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Judas and the apocalyptical book Revelations (of John). Which books are or are not to be included has therefore been disputed for a long time. Even Martin Luther questioned, amongst others, the books of Jacob, Jude and the Revelations of John. Even though he eventually included them in 'his' Bible, he said, for example, regarding the book of Jacob: "I do not hold it to be of apostolic authorship" (Barclay, 1976). His rejection of the Biblical book of Jacob, traditionally ascribed to the brother of Jesus, therefore largely relates to doubts regarding its authorship.

Within contemporary theology, there exists by now a broad consensus regarding the fact that different books from the Bible have been ascribed to persons that most likely did not write them. Not only Jacob, but also the Gospels of Mark, Luke, Matthew and John are disputed in this regard. For example, none of the oldest manuscripts of the Gospels—which describe the life of Jesus—contains the title that is found in our modern Bible. Whether a Mark or a Matthew are indeed the authors remains unknown.

However, there is more. There are, for example, also strong indications that the Apostle Paul is not responsible for the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. The completely anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews does not seem to be of his writing either (Ehrman, 2012). Moreover, the doubts with regard to authorship are not limited to the New Testament. Traditionally, it is assumed that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Bible. However, considering amongst others the way in which Deuteronomy 34:7 describes his death, there seems to have been at least one other author or scribe responsible for the transmitted books (Raymsay, 1996). After

all, it is impossible that he wrote the following Biblical text regarding his own death: "And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."

The matter of authorship also relates to the acknowledged period between the events and their documentation. A factor in this is also the question of possible eyewitnesses. Views vary regarding this. For example, the late Professor John Robinson and the late Professor William F. Albright dated all books of the New Testament to be from before the year 80 (Robinson, 1976). In his work 'The Book of Revelation', Professor Robert Mounce states that he finds the year 90 to be more probable. Dating remains controversial considering that there exists not a single original manuscript. All that we have are copies of copies of copies (Metzger, 2005). Even though many thousands of such copies have been found—which is historically unmatched—it remains far from certain that the first copy corresponds in its contents with the original of the eyewitness. After all, we have no eyewitness reports. For example, according to the current standings within theology, the Gospel of Mark is the oldest Gospel. At the earliest, this document was written around the year 70 after Christ. The oldest copy in our possession, however, dates from the year 220 after Christ. That means there is a gap of one hundred and fifty years. Moreover, nowhere in the Gospels does it state that they were eyewitness reports (Ehrman, 2011).

Besides the doubts related to dogma—as mentioned at the beginning of this book—and the canonisation and question of authorship described above, the various apparent contradictions in the writings of the authors of the Bible also played a role in my growing doubt regarding the Christian faith. Dr. Shabir Ally mentions some of the contradictions that I also encountered during my further studies of

the Bible. For example, I wondered who inspired King David to count his people. Was it God, as mentioned in the Biblical book of 2 Samuel 24:1, or was it Satan, as we can read in 1 Chronicles 21:1? Not a minor difference, mind you. The following are other clear contradictions:

- In the Biblical book of 2 Samuel 24:9, it is stated that the total population of Israel is 800,000, while 1 Chronicles 21:5 states that it is more than a million (1.1).
- Was Ahaziah twenty-two (2 Chronicles 8:26) or forty-two years old (2 Chronicles 22:2) when he began to rule Jerusalem?
- Was Jeconiah eighteen (2 Kings 24:8) or eight years old (2 Chronicles 36:9) when he ascended the throne of Jerusalem?
- Did David take 700 (2 Samuel 8:4) or 7,000 (1 Chronicles 18:4) horsemen prisoner from the king of Zoba?
- Did Judas buy an acre (Acts 1:18) with his blood money for betraying Jesus, or did he throw it in the temple (Matthew 27:5)?
- Did Judas die by hanging himself (Matthew 27:5) or by "falling headlong, bursting asunder in the midst, with all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18)?
- Were Jesus' last words "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46) or "It is finished" (John 19:30)?
- Did God decide that the lifespan of human beings would be merely one hundred and twenty years (Genesis 6:3) or did people live much longer (Genesis 11:11-15)?
- Mark 16:5-6 states that the women were informed of what happened with Jesus' body, while in John 20:2 Mary was not informed of anything.
- Was it David—as is generally assumed—that killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:23-50), or was it Elhanan (2 Samuel 21:19)?

all, it is impossible that he wrote the following Biblical text regarding his own death: "And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."

The matter of authorship also relates to the acknowledged period between the events and their documentation. A factor in this is also the question of possible eyewitnesses. Views vary regarding this. For example, the late Professor John Robinson and the late Professor William F. Albright dated all books of the New Testament to be from before the year 80 (Robinson, 1976). In his work 'The Book of Revelation', Professor Robert Mounce states that he finds the year 90 to be more probable. Dating remains controversial considering that there exists not a single original manuscript. All that we have are copies of copies of copies (Metzger, 2005). Even though many thousands of such copies have been found—which is historically unmatched—it remains far from certain that the first copy corresponds in its contents with the original of the eyewitness. After all, we have no eyewitness reports. For example, according to the current standings within theology, the Gospel of Mark is the oldest Gospel. At the earliest, this document was written around the year 70 after Christ. The oldest copy in our possession, however, dates from the year 220 after Christ. That means there is a gap of one hundred and fifty years. Moreover, nowhere in the Gospels does it state that they were eyewitness reports (Ehrman, 2011).

Besides the doubts related to dogma—as mentioned at the beginning of this book—and the canonisation and question of authorship described above, the various apparent contradictions in the writings of the authors of the Bible also played a role in my growing doubt regarding the Christian faith. Dr. Shabir Ally mentions some of the contradictions that I also encountered during my further studies of

the Bible. For example, I wondered who inspired King David to count his people. Was it God, as mentioned in the Biblical book of 2 Samuel 24:1, or was it Satan, as we can read in 1 Chronicles 21:1? Not a minor difference, mind you. The following are other clear contradictions:

- In the Biblical book of 2 Samuel 24:9, it is stated that the total population of Israel is 800,000, while 1 Chronicles 21:5 states that it is more than a million (1.1).
- Was Ahaziah twenty-two (2 Chronicles 8:26) or forty-two years old (2 Chronicles 22:2) when he began to rule Jerusalem?
- Was Jeconiah eighteen (2 Kings 24:8) or eight years old (2 Chronicles 36:9) when he ascended the throne of Jerusalem?
- Did David take 700 (2 Samuel 8:4) or 7,000 (1 Chronicles 18:4) horsemen prisoner from the king of Zoba?
- Did Judas buy an acre (Acts 1:18) with his blood money for betraying Jesus, or did he throw it in the temple (Matthew 27:5)?
- Did Judas die by hanging himself (Matthew 27:5) or by "falling headlong, bursting asunder in the midst, with all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18)?
- Were Jesus' last words "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46) or "It is finished" (John 19:30)?
- Did God decide that the lifespan of human beings would be merely one hundred and twenty years (Genesis 6:3) or did people live much longer (Genesis 11:11-15)?
- Mark 16:5-6 states that the women were informed of what happened with Jesus' body, while in John 20:2 Mary was not informed of anything.
- Was it David—as is generally assumed—that killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:23-50), or was it Elhanan (2 Samuel 21:19)?

- Acts 9:7 mentions regarding the conversion of Paul—then known as Saul—that the men who travelled with Saul heard a voice, but saw no one. However, in Acts 22:9, we read that the men did see the light, but did not hear the voice.

The contradictions mentioned above are difficult to explain for Christians who consider the Bible to be flawless and inspired by God from 'cover to cover'. In my opinion, many of these contradictions and 'mistakes' in the Bible are the result of human error. Even Islam-critic and Christian apologist Jay Smith states that copying errors caused many contradictions in the Bible (Smith, 1995).

There is certainly something to be said regarding the Islamic claim that the Bible has undergone change over the years. This is called 'tahrif', which is Arabic for 'distortion' or 'modification'. We read in the 'Encyclopaedia of Islam' (published by Brill) that the concept of 'tahrif' has been discussed extensively by the tenth century polymath Ibn Hazm, who was one of the great names in the Zahiri school of law. He contested the authorship of Moses and proposed that Ezra was responsible for the Torah. This idea, that Jewish and Christian scripture have been distorted—intentionally or otherwise—is a part of religious polemics between the different traditions up to this day.

Textual certainty in the Quran

What then of the foundation of Islam? What about the Quran? How certain can one be regarding the transmitted text? Or to put it differently, does this notion of 'tahrif' also apply to Islam?

I posed this question to Professor Abdal Hakim Murad of Cambridge University. In his response, he added to the codification process described at the beginning of this chapter that within Islam it is generally accepted that the definitive version of the Quran was reconfirmed at the end of Muhammad's life. He is said to have recited the entire text, which was endorsed by Archangel Gabriel. This endorsed version was subsequently written down by Zayd bin Thabit, a copy of which is said to have been kept at the house of Muhammad's widow Hafsa. Fifteen years later, 'Uthman used this text—again with the help of Zayd and through consultation with the leading companions of Muhammad—in order to compile 'the codex of 'Uthman'.

We find this reading, amongst others, in the following Hadith (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 4987-4988): "Hudhayfa bin al-Yaman came to 'Uthman at the time when the people of the Levant and the people of Iraq were waging war to conquer Armenia and Azerbaijan. Hudhayfa was afraid of their differences (between the people of Sham and Iraq) in the recitation of the Quran, so he said to 'Uthman: 'O chief of the Believers! Save this nation before they differ about the Book (the Quran) as Jews and the Christians did before.' 'Uthman then sent a message to Hafsa, saying: 'Send us the manuscripts of the Quran so that we may compile the Quranic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you.' Hafsa sent it to 'Uthman. 'Uthman then ordered Zayd bin Thabit, 'Abdullah bin al-Zubayr, Sa'id bin al-'As and 'Abd al-Rahman bin Harith bin Hisham to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies. 'Uthman said to the three men of the Quraysh: 'In case you disagree with Zayd bin Thabit on any point in the Quran, then write it in the dialect of Quraysh, the Quran was revealed in their tongue.' They did so, and when they had written many copies, 'Uthman returned the original manuscripts to Hafsa. 'Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied and ordered that all the other Quranic materials, whether written in fragments of manuscripts or entire copies, be burnt." Zayd bin Thabit added: "A

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verse from *Sura Ahzab* was missed by me when we copied the Quran and I used to hear Allah's Messenger reciting it. So we searched for it and found it with Khuzayma bin Thabit al-Ansari. (That verse was 33.23): 'Among the Believers are men who have been true in their covenant with Allah.'"

Compared to the Bible, and other 'Holy Books' for that matter, it is exceptional that there exist rather detailed records with regard to the author, the compilation and the writing down of the Quran. Even though there are a number of critics—such as Professor Emeritus of Islamic Studies Francis Peters—who state that different parts have been added or deliberately left out (Peters, 1994), the oldest manuscripts point to a textual stability according to Professor Abdal Hakim Murad. Professors Crone (who passed away in 2015) and Cook (Emeritus), both specialised in Islamic history, cast doubt as well upon the traditional understanding with regard to the preservation of the text. In their article written in 1976 and later book 'Hagarism', they note: "There is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century." Crone even claims that all the primary sources have been drawn up one hundred and fifty to three hundred years after the events that they describe took place. Even though this theory is still frequently being put forward in debates and discussion, hardly any academic takes it seriously (Waines, 1995). The late Richard Bell and Montgomery Watt, too, share the traditional understanding with regard to the preservation of the content of the Quran. They state: "Modern study of the Quran has not in fact raised any serious question of its authenticity..."

In 2015, there also appeared a study by El-Wakil that researches the evidence regarding the existence of a 'master copy' of the Quran during the life of Muhammad, which was later also used by 'Uthman and his companions in compiling his codex. Remarkably, this study was within

Shi'a circles, in which certain currents question the historical transmission of the text of the Quran. The researcher concludes that the current text of the Quran, aside of 'less than minor details', has not been changed and that it was in part due this 'master copy' that the text has remained intact throughout the centuries.

Finally, we read in 'The Story of the Quran' by Professor Mattson that there certainly exist different readings of the Quran. These variations, however, already existed during the lifetime of Muhammad. In the Hadith collections, we find narrations that mention seven different readings, which are all considered 'canonical'. The differences mostly regard details in vocalisation and script. In a Hadith from Imam Malik's *Muwatta'*, 'Umar said: "I heard Hisham bin Hakim bin Hizam reciting *Sura al-Furqan* differently from me, and it was the Messenger of Allah who had recited it to me. I was about to rush up to him but I granted him a respite until he had finished his prayer. Then I grabbed him by his cloak and took him to the Messenger of Allah and said: 'Messenger of Allah, I heard this man reciting *Sura al-Furqan* differently from the way you recited it to me.' The Messenger of Allah said: 'Let him go.' Then he said: 'Recite, Hisham,' and Hisham recited as I had heard him recite. The Messenger of Allah said: 'It was sent down like that.' Then he said to me: 'Recite' and I recited the *Sura*, and he said: 'It was sent down like that. This Quran was sent down in seven (different) ways, so recite from it whatever is easy for you.'"

Biblical problem, Quranic solution?

It is clear that there are differences between the Bible and the Quran in terms of the documentation and transmission of the text. It is also remarkable, however, that many stories have a slightly different twist in

the Quran than they do in the Bible. Mathematics professor Jeffrey Lang (a frequently-asked speaker on Islam) writes in his book 'Struggling to Surrender' that there are various aspects of the Bible considered to be problematic which are absent in the Quran.

Western scholars have struggled for centuries *after* Muhammad with the setting of, amongst others, the story of Joseph, in which the sons of Jacob travel the vast desert of the Sinai by donkey (Genesis 42:26). However, donkeys are not suitable for long-distance travels and therefore not used as nomadic travelling animals. Nevertheless, these descendants of Abraham had a nomadic lifestyle until they settled in Egypt. In the Quran, we read much the same story, with the exception that this journey through 'a sea of sand' was not by donkey but, as is common practice, by camel. There is explicit mention of a caravan and camels (verses 12:65, 12:70, 12:72 and 12:82).

Another example is the famous story of Noah and the flood. In Genesis 7:23, we read: "And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the earth, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark." For centuries, it was assumed that this regarded a global flood, which destroyed practically everything on earth. Today, based on manifold geological and archaeological research, it is accepted that this flood did take place, but that it was of a local nature. The first to suggest this theory was Sir Leonard Woolley (a British archaeologist). In the historical city of Ur (in the southeast of Iraq), he found evidence suggesting an enormous valley flood of nearly 400 miles in length and more than 100 miles in width—larger than the surface of the Netherlands). He, and many other scientists after him, stated: "...but for the occupants of the valley, that was the whole world."

Professor Lang also points out in his book that according to Biblical chronology, this catastrophe must have taken place around 2300 BC. However, based on archaeological findings, we now know that from that period onward until today many flourishing cultures have existed around the world. This would have been impossible according to the Biblical story. This Biblical report regarding such a devastating punishment caused me significant headache in my younger years as well. Why would God exterminate the entire population of the world, only because the people of Noah lived in sin? Was this not rather drastic? Why did it have to take place in such a way that practically all plant and animal life, wherever it may be in the world, would perish? It did not seem to be in line with the God that Jesus preached about. In the Quran, too, we find the story about Noah and the flood: "And the people of Noah, when they denied the messengers, We drowned them, and We made them for mankind a sign. And We have prepared for the wrongdoers a painful punishment." (25:37) This was a massive event in which those who rejected the message of Noah perished, but it was local. This version is easier to accept (from a human perspective as well). It does also not contradict the scientific findings of our times.

The last example I would like to give here, and where the Quran seems to offer a good alternative to a Biblical story that is otherwise often considered problematic, is the story of creation. Genesis, the first book of the Bible, gives the impression that the stages of creation are literally 'days' or twenty-four hour periods. After the completion of each phase, we read (in Genesis 1:5, 1:8, 1:13, 1:19, 1:23 and 1:31): "And the evening and the morning were the first day… second day… third day…" Despite all scientific developments and contemporary knowledge of the age of the earth (around 4.5 billion years), it is still believed— especially in orthodox-Protestant (and evangelical) circles—

that the days are literal and that the earth is merely a couple of thousand years old.

A classical work in this regard is 'The Genesis Flood' by Whitcomb and the late Professor Morris. In it, they list various objections regarding the contemporary notion of a local flood. In the last chapter, however, they do acknowledge that, amongst other things, the coral reefs, the petrified forests and the varves (sedimentary layers that formed within a year), indicate that the earth is very old and, with it, challenge their own theory. Professor Lang also demonstrates that here the Quranic narrative shows similarities with the Biblical story, but without the problematic aspect. In the Quran, too, there is mention of the 'days' of creation (verse 32:4), but it is followed by an explanation of how these 'days' are to be understood. Verse 32:5 states: "…a day, the extent of which is a thousand years of those which you count." Days are here therefore not by definition to be understood from a human perspective. A year, here, covers a much longer period. In addition, states Professor Lang, a day in the Quran does not necessarily express a fixed time unit. This idea corresponds with verse 70:4: "…in a day the extent of which is fifty thousand years." The Quranic perspective on time—and with it the days of creation—is less textually static compared to that of the Bible. Here where the Quranic approach departs from the Biblical version of a story, it 'complements' or 'omits', and in such a way that it often seems to give the narrative a stronger foundation.

A characteristic distinction

What I also noticed with regard to the Quran as a topic, compared to what I was accustomed to in the Bible, is the complete involvement of God in the life of man. On every page, the reader is addressed and

the text turns back to God. There is no *Sura* in which God is not mentioned—either directly or indirectly through His ninety-nine names. The Bible, on the other hand, contains passages that are strictly historical in nature, or solely regard finances or other worldly matters. There is even a complete book, Esther, in which there is no reference whatsoever to God. The generally used term 'Lord' or 'God' is nowhere to be found in the text. This is a remarkable difference. Moreover, the Quran calls to act in a very practical way. For example, think of prayer, fasting, or charity. It is certainly the case that Christians are very active in social work, in a positive way; many charities and welfare organisations in fact have a Christian foundation. However, working *within* faith and *for* redemption is absent in Protestant Christian theology.

One of the most important founders of the Reformation, and with it Protestantism, is of course Martin Luther. One of the most important, if not perhaps *the* main teaching of his theology, is that mankind is not justified—that is, saved from doom— by his good works or by following the law of God, but solely by the *mercy* of God (in accordance with the text from Romans 1:17). This justification 'by faith alone' is generally expressed in Latin as 'sola fide'. That man could actively contribute to his redemption by doing good and avoiding evil was in his eyes a form of 'legalism' (Akker and Nissen, 1999).

Even though within Islam, God is not dependent in any way on anyone, including man (verse 29:6), and faith is certainly considered the foundation, mankind *is* called to work in faith. It offers a complete embodiment of the Islamic teachings and can function as a guide to realise mankind's existence on earth. In that regard, verse 2:177 seems to connect 'religious works' with the practices of daily life: "Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but (true) righteousness is (in) one who believes in Allah, the Last

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Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets, and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, those who ask (for help), and for freeing slaves; (and who) establishes prayer and gives alms [*zakat*]; (those who) fulfil their promise when they promise; and (those who) are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous."

A last remarkable characteristic of the Quran compared to the Bible that I would like to point out here, is the fact that this book does not have a particular chronological order (i.e. it is not linear). Dr. Lang writes that it is nearly impossible to date Quranic passages or to place them [in their proper place] without referring to external sources. One can read the Quran itself in nearly any order. As long as its entire content is covered, one may understand from it the most important basic commandments, without additional references. In this sense, the Quran knows no actual beginning or ending; a nearly symbolical expression of the Islamic belief that the Quran contains an eternal message, which transcends time and space.

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> *"No, the Taliban are not extreme. Women should generally stay at home and not be visible in public for other men to see. And those executions in the stadiums a couple of years ago are also part of the shari'a. This may seem harsh, but that is what it says in the Quran and therefore the will of God. Muslims who reject this are westernised and afraid to read what it literally says."*

A response I received to a question at an Islamic gathering in Eindhoven (2006)

11. The Wahhabi delusion

> "I have not been sent as an invoker of curses,
> but I have been sent as a mercy."
>
> Muhammad (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 2599)

In recent years, so-called 'Salafism' has become a frequently-used term in the public debate about Islam, extremism and terrorism. Remarkable in this regard is the often sociological, anthropological and political approach to this phenomenon. As a result, it is defined from the perspective of these disciplines. The theological perspective, however, often remains unexposed, which is detrimental to the comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. After all, it concerns a religious concept.

At its basis, Salafism seeks a return to the way of life of the 'predecessors' [*salaf*]. Al-Yaqoubi states that the ideal within this current consists of acting in accordance with the example set by the first three generations of Muslims (the *sahaba*, the *tabi'un* and the *tabi' al-tabi'in*). The starting point can be traced back to, amongst others, the following Hadith in which can be read how Muhammad responded to the question of which people are the best of the believers: "Those of the generation to which I belong, then of the second generation, then of the third generation" (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 2536). Therefore, Salafis seek to model themselves as much as possible on the first three generations of Muslims. According to them, this distinguishes them from 'mainstream' believers. Professor Abdal Hakim Murad states that this claim carries a rather exclusivist principle with it, which suggests that other Muslims do not, or do not sufficiently, seek to follow this ideal.

This claim on the right 'practice' seems presumptuous considering that following the Sunna (the example set by Muhammad) is the starting point within Islam in general. In fact, Islamic denominations that do *not* consider the first generations an example to follow do not exist. This is the reason why sometimes it is said that, theoretically and within this context, every Muslim is 'somewhat Salafi'. Of course, this is unrelated to the Wahhabi understanding of the concept which causes so much misery. Remarkably, 'Salafism' is also not a term that can be traced back to the Quran or Hadith. It is simply a general denotation for an approach to Islam. The underlying question is how to interpret and practise Islam.

Wahhabism

As mentioned earlier, Al-Yaqoubi seeks to trace back the origin of Salafism to Saudi Wahhabism, a very puritanical interpretation of Islam named after its founder, Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). His primary goal was to oppose innovations within the faith. The means for this was supposedly a return to the so-called Islam of the predecessors. Practically, this meant that the Wahhabis—who rarely call themselves that, but rather prefer the term Salafi—have very restrictive views regarding numerous matters such as: gender segregation, head and face covering for women, music (in a broad sense), interaction with those of different faiths, having a beard, Sufism, and the belief in saints and visiting their graves. According to Professor of Islamic Studies Khaled Abou El Fadl (2005), the principle of *'takfir'* (to declare various groups of fellow Muslims as non-Muslim) also has a prominent position within their discourse. In the media—but also within Wahhabi circles themselves—Wahhabism is often seen as a form of Sunni Islam that knows no compromise, which is also the view that Islam-critics

have of the religion as a whole. I too was of the opinion that this exclusivist, excluding and harsh message was the only true reflection of Islam.

The way in which (in the West) Wahhabism is presented as 'pure' Sunni Islam, however, is incorrect and partially the result of the earlier mentioned sociological, anthropological and political approach. During my studies of Professor Algar's work (2002), I found to my surprise that he points to the fact that, from its inception, the leading Sunni scholars rejected the movement of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab as he rejected many traditional beliefs and practices of Sunni Islam. How ironic. The war rhetoric (and practice) at the time against Muslims who disputed the teachings of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab was heavily criticised as well and considered a dangerous deviation. As a matter of fact, it was the father and the brother of Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab—both Islamic scholars, and his father a judge [*qadi*] as well—who were the first to take the initiative in refuting his teachings. His brother wrote the book 'The Final Word from the Quran, the Hadith, and the Sayings of the Scholars Concerning the School of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab' (Al-Rasheed, 2008). Moreover, in the essay 'The Refutation of Wahhabism in Arabic Sources, 1745-1932', Professor Redissi (2008) presents various historical sources in which Sunni scholars described (what was the early stage of) Wahhabism as an 'undermining sect', 'an excess' and an offshoot of the *'Khawarij'*.

What has especially caused (and continues to cause) much misery is the over-lenient use of the theological principle of *takfir*, expressing that a Muslim has become an apostate, or that a particular act is a form of disbelief (Hassan, 2017). We see how the ad hoc application of *takfir* is also the practice of terror organisations modelled after Wahhabism, such as Boko Haram, ISIS and Al-Qaeda. According to Professor Algar (2002), this aberration is related to one of the characteristics of

Wahhabism as well: "non-consistent compliance with one of the four schools of law [*madhhabs*]."

As described above, deviating from the traditional Sunni system was one of the greater criticisms of Wahhabism. According to Professor Abdal Hakim Murad, Wahhabism adopts an often literal (and theologically impoverished) interpretation. In doing so, there is little to no concern for the deeper meanings of words and sentences in classical Arabic, or the views and explanations of thousands of scholars who often dedicated their entire lives to the study of the Islamic sources. This makes Wahhabism a deficient current.

Regarding the contemporary groups that profess to follow only the Quran and Sunna, he mentions:

> The understanding that traditional Islam has had… of the Quran and the Hadith… is based on the accumulated wisdom, reflection and discussion—over centuries—of thousands of transformed souls… [I expect] that we recognise that the *'ulama'* (scholars of Islam) know the Quran and the Sunna better than we do. Another sign of the dispersal and confusion of the modern Muslim mentality and our initiation into the logic of multiplicity is that we are now trusting ourselves, that we say 'Quran and Sunna', 'Quran and Sunna', neglecting the fact that the Quran and the Sunna always has an interpreter. That interpreter can either be ourselves, or it can be the consensus of thousands upon thousands of great transformed souls, people who know the Quran and the Sunna outwardly and inwardly better than we ever will. So I would say that it is a form of implicit *shirk* (ostentation) to say, 'I am going to bypass the tradition and go directly to the sources, the Quran and Sunna', because it is to set at one's own judgement as being superior to the judgement of all of those others, which is an absurdity.

It is probably the greatest most pernicious error in the modern *umma* to say, 'Well, a hundred thousand Shafi'i *'ulama'* might have come to this position, and I am not really going to trouble myself to read all of the thousands of books through which this position was negotiated and arrived at. I am going to say, "I know better"'. That really is a form of pharaonic arrogance. This is not a minor error, a minor slip in our understanding of how Islamic education should take place. It is a very fundamental error; it is a Protestant error if you like. The idea that our personal contrivances are so refined and so pure that we can understand the Scriptures better than earlier generations, whole armies of great, purified souls, is an absurdity and a form of arrogance. It is also a form of backbiting to say that the *'ulama'* simply got it wrong, and that we are going to get it right. This is probably the greatest act of collective backbiting in the history of the *umma*, that we should be eating the dead flesh of deceased *'ulama'*, saying that they got it wrong, they were people of *taqlid*, they were Ash'aris, they were Hanafis, they were whatever, and we can get it right. That is backbiting. …[I base myself] on the certainty that our minds are infinitely more fallible than the minds of past generations of great *'ulama'* (of the four schools).

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, too, discusses this topic:

> It is just all these young boys out there on Google. That is who now rules this religion: young boys, not people that will spend twenty years to study the religion, to look at what the *fuqaha'* (jurists) say… You open up the Quran for everybody, and say: 'Oh here it is'. Anybody can read the Quran, 'I know Arabic, I have a four year degree from Baghdad University'. Imam al-Shafi'i

Wahhabism as well: "non-consistent compliance with one of the four schools of law [*madhhabs*]."

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(founder of the Shafi'i school of law) studied seventeen years, these people did not speak about the religion. The *sahaba* (companions) were afraid to say things, they were afraid to speak.

It should be clear that both Shaykh Hamza Yusuf and Professor Abdal Hakim Murad consider the tradition to be of an elementary importance in understanding the Islamic religion correctly. Shaykh Hamza Yusuf also points to the developments in Saudi Arabia where of all people, the previous Imam of Mecca, 'Adil al-Kalbani, recently stated that Salafi concepts lie at the basis of the barbaric ISIS. Al-Kalbani, himself a Salafi, states that the Saudis "follow the same thought (as ISIS), but apply it in a refined manner." He is also of the opinion that it is time to change. According to him, the fundamental teachings of Islam are now being distorted, while the youth is being poisoned with bloodthirsty notions.

Al-Kalbani says that: "Clerics must take their heads out of the sand and move with the spirit of the times instead of rejecting and condemning any new idea." Al-Kalbani ends one of his pleas with the call not to remain stuck in a statically (and incorrectly) perceived past, but to look at the future and trust upon the fundamentals of the past: "We remain trapped in the dungeons of the very distant past... We should rely on the past as a foundation from which we head out to the future and to the building of the present (not destroying them)." This remarkable and very recent plea seems to find more of an audience in rigid Saudi Arabia. Changes are happening. In this regard, al-Kalbani also appears to point to the basis of traditional Islam as an answer to the crisis that has unfolded.

The madhhab system

Besides the different theological schools within Sunni Islam (the Ash'aris and Maturidis), one of the cornerstones of traditional Islamic transmission of knowledge is the system of *madhhabs*. In our various mail correspondences, Professor Abdal Hakim Murad termed this the Islamic system of 'checks and balances'. He wrote a book about the functioning and necessity of this system, titled 'Understanding the Four Madhhabs: The Facts about *Ijtihad* and *Taqlid*'. In it, he explains, amongst other things, the meaning of the terms *madhhab* and *mujtahid* and where the origin of this tradition of following a *madhhab* lies.

The term *'madhhab'* is an Arabic word which means 'to go' [*dhahaba*], or more specifically: 'time or place of departure'. It denotes the view of the Imam (and the school of law named after him) with regard to the *shari'a* ('from which the Imam departed'). Within Sunni Islam, these are the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools of law. Each of these schools is thus named after its founder, Imams Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi'i and Ahmad bin Hanbal respectively, who all operated in the seventh and/or eighth century. These four scholars are also called *'mujtahids'*, a term which expresses that one is capable of *'ijtihad'* (to judge regarding a matter related to the *shari'a*). A *mujtahid* is required to have thorough knowledge of the Quran and Hadith, classical Arabic, theology and *usul al-fiqh* (the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence). He also needs to be aware of any existing consensus and be familiar with the concept of abrogation. If someone is not sufficiently qualified within one of the mentioned fields, he is not a *mujtahid*.

Professor Abdal Hakim Murad explains that the history of the *madhhabs* relates to the fact that the average Muslim lacks the necessary knowledge with regard to the *shari'a* (i.e. the collective of religious

obligations and prohibitions in a broad sense). This has led to *taqlid*, which simply put means to follow one of these four great Imams in his judgements and conclusions. This does not apply to the basic principles of Islam ['*aqida*], which are presumed to be clear and understandable for everyone, such as belief in God, the angels and the Last Day.

However, this is different for religiously legal matters. Due to the enormous extent of the Islamic framework, satisfying the requirements and high standards of *ijtihad* would take a lifetime of study. This would make 'regular' life practically impossible. Therefore, explains Professor Abdal Hakim Murad, the basis for *taqlid* is found within the Quran itself. He points to verse 4:59: "O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you…" He states that this verse shows that following those of (religious) authority is encouraged within Islam. Verse 4:83 also seems to encourage consulting or following experts with regard to religious matters: "But if they had referred it back to the Messenger and to those of authority among them, then the ones who (can) draw correct conclusions from it would have known about it."

Besides the Quran, Professor Abdal Hakim Murad also cites a more commonplace argument for his plea to consult experts (the system of *madhhabs*) with regard to Islam:

> In our daily lives, we also leave matters beyond our control to experts. For example, when we need heart surgery, we obviously do not perform this operation ourselves after reading some books and watching a YouTube video, but we go to a licensed heart surgeon in an accredited hospital. Why should we act differently when it comes to the more complex religious matters of life?

Professor Abdal Hakim Murad also points to the fact that all great scholars of the past, including personalities such as al-Bukhari, Abu Dawud, and even Imam al-Ghazali, followed a *madhhab* (and were therefore *muqallids*, followers of a *mujtahid*).

This described necessity for the traditional transmission of Islamic knowledge is also an argument *against* the Wahhabi (Salafi) notion of not following a *madhhab*.

In 'Understanding the Four Madhhabs'—in line with Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller and Tahir Mahmood Kiani—Abdal Hakim Murad points out a basic contradiction of the Wahhabis with regard to not accepting the religious authority of 'the people of knowledge'. This group argues that we can understand the Hadith ourselves, without taking into consideration the conclusions of, for example, Imam Abu Hanifa (which is *taqlid*). However, merely opening the books and assuming the truthfulness of the narrations of al-Bukhari, for example, is *taqlid* as well. After all, they accept the views of al-Bukhari with regard to the authenticity of a particular Hadith, as well as the entire process of selection and interpretation that preceded it.

Personal consequences

After studying this thorough and supported response (from within Islam itself) to the extreme views of Wahhabism and its practices, my understanding of Islam as a static ideology of terror was slowly breaking down even further. A closer analysis of the global impact of Wahhabism made it even more explicit that this deviation from the traditional norm is a specific cause of many Islam-related conflicts. It had already been clear to me that the influence of this ideology was no longer confined to the Arabian peninsula. Research by The Henry Jackson Society (2017) shows that from the 1960s onwards, almost €60

billion has been spent in the worldwide spread of Wahhabi thought. These funds have been used, amongst other things, to build hundreds of very fundamentalist centres and colleges, 1,500 Wahhabi-inspired mosques and 2,000 schools. According to Youssef Ibrahim (of the Council of Foreign Relations), this has taken place in non-Muslim as well as Muslim countries—from Pakistan to the Netherlands to Sudan.

Where for a long time Wahhabi propaganda solely made its way through sermons, books and DVDs, today these notions are reaching the youth in a much easier way—through YouTube and Facebook. Through direct propaganda in various European countries and by migration, Wahhabi views are becoming more prominently present in the West as well. In 2016, the General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands reported that Salafism (with its Wahhabi foundation) is becoming more established in mosques and that this leads to tension and even violence. An example of this is a video that I vividly recall, in which a young Muslim beat a much older Imam to the ground in a mosque in Amsterdam. The background of this conflict related to the message that preached in the mosque, which, according to the self-proclaimed Salafi perpetrator of this violence, was not 'pure' enough. Many acts of terror as well, from Kenya to France and from Somalia to the U.S., cannot be viewed separately from the global spread of this ideology that has been taking place for many decades.

The earlier cited al-Kalbani states that Wahhabism or Salafism has left a trail of blood behind. Besides the geopolitical realities of Western interventions, interference and destabilisation in countries such as Iraq, he also and especially points to the ideology itself as a cause for the rise of extremism in the region. He makes these statements in several YouTube videos—the URLs of which are included in the bibliography of this book. 'Adil al-Kalbani states that organisations such as ISIS "draw their ideas from what is written in our own books, from our own

principles." Regarding the numerous murders committed by ISIS against, amongst others, journalists, al-Kalbani says: "…their blood was shed based on Salafi fatwas, not outside the Salafi framework." The criticism cannot be any clearer, in my opinion. Contrary to what we often think in the West, the discussion regarding the misinterpretations found within this deviant system of belief quite often and rather openly takes place within the Islamic world, something which the West often continues to consider 'scary', 'populist' or 'not the task of a secular state'.

In this concluding stage of my personal research, I can say that the images portrayed in such a video (of the mosque in Amsterdam) are diametrically opposed to traditional Islam. This also applies to the threats, terror and excessive 'all-out violence', which, in spite of what I have been claiming for a long time, are certainly not the core of Islam. However, to say that they have nothing to do with it at all does not seem very meaningful to me either, certainly not as long as its claimants seek their legitimisation within this religion. Factually, however, it is an aberration, a (Wahhabi) deviation of the historically broad 'middle path', just as there have been other such deviations in the past. The 'middle path' should not be about repression and hardship. The example set by Muhammad served a different purpose, as he states in his own words: "I have not been sent as an invoker of curses, but I have been sent as a mercy (for mankind)." (*Sahih Muslim*, no. 2599)

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"Indeed, I no longer see any sustainable arguments to disqualify Muhammad as a Prophet. Does this fact make me, therefore, a Muslim? In my opinion, the example he set is more than deserving of imitation. However, looking at certain groups of Muslims, embracing Islam is something that I would only do with an enormous reluctance."

My response to a question by a Christian friend and pastor

12. From Saul to Paul

"And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"

Acts 9:4

Saul was a pious Jewish man from the city of Tarsus (in today's Turkey) who was proud of his religion. In the year 34 after Christ, he was a witness to the stoning of Stefan, the first Christian martyr, which he condoned according to the Biblical book of Acts 8. After his death, Saul sought to destroy the first Christian community—which he considered a Jewish deviation—by dragging men and women violently from their homes and imprisoning them. He then left for Damascus to persecute the followers of Christ there as well. However, on his journey he suddenly saw a light and heard the voice of Jesus who asked Saul why he was persecuting him. He repented, denounced violence against the first Christian community and eventually even became a follower of Christ. Thereafter, Saul became Paul and joined the Apostles (the students of Jesus). From then on, he preached the Gospel that he had previously opposed so fiercely.

The experience of Paul described above reflects up to a certain point my own personal path as well. Even though in my case, I cannot pinpoint a specific moment in which my views drastically changed, the break with my previous views is evident. From considering it a dark worldview, I came to regard Islam as a completion of the monotheistic revelations. It was a phased development, as I described in the previous chapters, which began with the eroding of my faith in the fundamentals of Christianity such as the Trinity, the Original Sin and above all the necessity of a blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Considering that the fundamental belief in God did not disappear, I (first)

unconsciously sought a concept of God that, in my opinion, would be more logical and free of the dogmas that I struggled with in Christianity.

With a certain discomfort, I noticed that the macro-theology of Islam attracted me, especially the exceptional combination of the abstraction of basic concepts—the absolute oneness and immense greatness of God—and the very personal way in which the reader is approached in the Quran. However, this did not remove the many objections I had against Islam and its messenger. I therefore continued to pursue my long-standing wish to write a critique of Islam. As I was writing, I frequently came across questions to which the literature I had access to did not offer unambiguous answers, such as with regard to abrogation.

In order to get more clarity, I wrote to various authorities within Islam, including Professor Abdal Hakim Murad of Cambridge University. He either offered direct and substantive answers to many topics—which have also been discussed throughout this book—or put me on the right track (of books) of experts with regard to the topics in question. Along the way it turned out, as can be read above, that those matters which had appeared so controversial to me were less controversial than I had previously thought. Islamic history in general, as well as the life and Prophethood of Muhammad, took on a different understanding when placed in their proper context; not the perverted understanding of the 'hordes of death', which Islam-critics also consider to be true, but an understanding aimed at growth.

My views fundamentally changed and—as has already been mentioned in the introduction—a new paradigm imposed itself upon me. Despite the sometimes preposterous practice of certain (groups of) Muslims, I began to see Islam as a positive worldview that did not diametrically oppose 'my' Western values and ideas, but ironically enough often partially formed a historical foundation for them. The contributions in physics and mathematics—of which I was generally aware already—are examples of this. However, it was new to me that Islamic culture, through the book 'Hayy bin Yaqzan' amongst others, was also influential in the development of Western (paleo-)liberal philosophy.

Before I get to the question of where my quest has brought me, I would first like to discuss briefly a number of points that have also played a role—albeit a secondary one—in my view and appreciation of Islam.

An Islamic foundation of modern civilisation

The historical influence of Islam on the development of human civilisation has been very significant. For example, the often-cited classical Greek works (of Aristotle, amongst others) were translated at Islamic institutions (often by Nestorian monks), first into Arabic and later into Latin. These works were indispensable for the birth of the renaissance in fourteenth century Europe. Furthermore, within mathematics, astronomy, physics and many other areas, our present-day (technological) civilisation is greatly indebted to the Islamic civilisation of the past. We continue to see much reflection of this through language. Think of words such as algorithm (named after its Islamic founder, al-Khwarizmi), algebra (from 'al-jabr', from the title of one of al-Khwarizmi's works), or checkmate (from 'shah mat', which means 'the [Persian] king has died). Everyday names and things that we continue to use have also entered our continent through contact with Muslims. Examples of this are candy (from 'qandi', which means sugared), carat (from 'qirat', which is a unit of a small quantity related to

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the medieval Arabic *dinar*), caravan (from the Persian *'karawan'*, which means 'a moveable residence'), the guitar [*qitara*], magazine [*makhazin*], sofa (*'suffa'*, which is a ledge or bench) and syrup/sorbet (*'shariba'*, which means 'to drink').

Professor Lyons wrote the book 'House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilisation' in which he, in a very clear manner, shows the importance of this forgotten past. The title of the book refers to *'Bayt al-Hikma'*, an academic institute in eighth century Baghdad founded by the caliph al-Ma'mun. The primary activity of the 'House' was the translation of Greek philosophical and scientific works, which according to the narration were brought from 'the land of Rum' (Byzantium) by a delegation of the caliph. One of the geniuses of that time, the above-mentioned al-Khwarizmi, was affiliated with this House of Wisdom. This Uzbek mathematician born in 783 was an enormous influence for the West with his star table (with which lunar eclipses could be predicted), the earlier mentioned algebra, the very refined astrolabe (the most accurate pre-modern computer) and the introduction of the Hindu-Arabic numeral system.

Muslims also brought to the West alchemy (the precursor to modern chemistry), devised trigonometry ('triangle-math') and spherical geometry, which was invaluable to map-making, navigation and localising cities and stars (of which many carry Arabic names as well). Professor Lyons, of course, also mentions the tenth century Ibn Sina (Avicenna in Latin) who was renowned in the West. His 'Canon of Medicine' was for centuries *the* standard reference work for physicians in the West. A summary is certainly not complete without the Andalusian polymath Ibn Rushd (Averroes in Latin). This 'phenomenon' lived in twelfth century Cordoba (in today's Spain) and Marrakech (in Morocco). He was a great influence on Christian and Jewish thought, most prominently as the commentator of the works of

Aristotle, but also as an astronomer and physician. Lastly, he mentions Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen in Latin) who was considered *the* authority on optical sciences. Later European greats such as Newton and Descartes used *his* work as a reference.

Next to the discoveries and insights mentioned above, perhaps the most important thing that the West learned from the Islamic world is that faith and reason can co-exist. After all, it was *this* insight that made independent research into the creation possible in all of its facets.

Liberalism, conservatism and Islam

At the beginning of this chapter, I have mentioned that Islam has also deeply influenced Western liberalism—something which friend and foe are almost completely unfamiliar with. Between 1169 and 1182, the philosopher, physician and astronomer Ibn Tufayl wrote a book called *'Hayy bin Yaqzan'*, which is one of the most intriguing works I came across during my personal research. According to Professor G. J. Toomer in his book 'Eastern Wisdom and Learning', *'Hayy bin Yaqzan'* was a defining work. After it was translated into English in 1674, it even became a bestseller in Western Europe until well into the eighteenth century. He thus calls its influence on Western philosophy unmistakable.

Ibn Tufayl developed the concept of *'tabula rasa'* in his book more than five centuries before John Locke (the father of liberalism) made it a central part of his masterpiece, 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding'. John Locke certainly knew of Ibn Tufayl's writings, as he was a student of Arabist and priest Edward Pococke, who had already translated *'Hayy bin Yaqzan'* into Latin in 1671. The book tells the story of a baby, Hayy bin Yaqzan, who washes ashore on an abandoned island. Without any human civilisation around him, he is

the medieval Arabic *dinar*), caravan (from the Persian *'karawan'*, which means 'a moveable residence'), the guitar [*qitara*], magazine [*makhazin*], sofa (*'suffa'*, which is a ledge or bench) and syrup/sorbet (*'shariba'*, which means 'to drink').

Professor Lyons wrote the book 'House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilisation' in which he, in a very clear manner, shows the importance of this forgotten past. The title of the book refers to *'Bayt al-Hikma'*, an academic institute in eighth century Baghdad founded by the caliph al-Ma'mun. The primary activity of the 'House' was the translation of Greek philosophical and scientific works, which according to the narration were brought from 'the land of Rum' (Byzantium) by a delegation of the caliph. One of the geniuses of that time, the above-mentioned al-Khwarizmi, was affiliated with this House of Wisdom. This Uzbek mathematician born in 783 was an enormous influence for the West with his star table (with which lunar eclipses could be predicted), the earlier mentioned algebra, the very refined astrolabe (the most accurate pre-modern computer) and the introduction of the Hindu-Arabic numeral system.

Muslims also brought to the West alchemy (the precursor to modern chemistry), devised trigonometry ('triangle-math') and spherical geometry, which was invaluable to map-making, navigation and localising cities and stars (of which many carry Arabic names as well). Professor Lyons, of course, also mentions the tenth century Ibn Sina (Avicenna in Latin) who was renowned in the West. His 'Canon of Medicine' was for centuries *the* standard reference work for physicians in the West. A summary is certainly not complete without the Andalusian polymath Ibn Rushd (Averroes in Latin). This 'phenomenon' lived in twelfth century Cordoba (in today's Spain) and Marrakech (in Morocco). He was a great influence on Christian and Jewish thought, most prominently as the commentator of the works of

Aristotle, but also as an astronomer and physician. Lastly, he mentions Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen in Latin) who was considered *the* authority on optical sciences. Later European greats such as Newton and Descartes used *his* work as a reference.

Next to the discoveries and insights mentioned above, perhaps the most important thing that the West learned from the Islamic world is that faith and reason can co-exist. After all, it was *this* insight that made independent research into the creation possible in all of its facets.

Liberalism, conservatism and Islam

At the beginning of this chapter, I have mentioned that Islam has also deeply influenced Western liberalism—something which friend and foe are almost completely unfamiliar with. Between 1169 and 1182, the philosopher, physician and astronomer Ibn Tufayl wrote a book called *'Hayy bin Yaqzan'*, which is one of the most intriguing works I came across during my personal research. According to Professor G. J. Toomer in his book 'Eastern Wisdom and Learning', *'Hayy bin Yaqzan'* was a defining work. After it was translated into English in 1674, it even became a bestseller in Western Europe until well into the eighteenth century. He thus calls its influence on Western philosophy unmistakable.

Ibn Tufayl developed the concept of *'tabula rasa'* in his book more than five centuries before John Locke (the father of liberalism) made it a central part of his masterpiece, 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding'. John Locke certainly knew of Ibn Tufayl's writings, as he was a student of Arabist and priest Edward Pococke, who had already translated *'Hayy bin Yaqzan'* into Latin in 1671. The book tells the story of a baby, Hayy bin Yaqzan, who washes ashore on an abandoned island. Without any human civilisation around him, he is

raised by a gazelle. Through observation, experimentation and speculation, step-by-step he develops deep insights into the physical realm, philosophy and eventually theology. The author in fact describes the development of human reason and knowledge. The main character begins as a 'blank slate' (with an 'empty' consciousness, of *before* the experience, *'tabula rasa'* in Latin). Through reason and experience, he eventually comes to comprehend the world around him and reaches insight into reality, with at its highest level awareness of the one Cause of the universe: God.

This notion that someone through his reason can unfold the truths of the natural (as well as the metaphysical) world, became *the* foundation of the later Enlightenment (the so-called Age of Reason) in Europe. Independent research—disconnected from the institute of the Church—in which the individual and his rational capacities eventually even became the basis for the free and modern West. Nevertheless, today, from both sides, it is rather regularly stated that these notions are incompatible with Islam. Based on the deplorable state of numerous Islamic countries and the various conflicts in the region—which often have an external catalyst—this is not an odd thought. However, in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe they knew better. After all, Islam, amongst others, with its inventors, philosophers and writers inspired the great (paleo-)liberal European thinkers. It was the Muslims and their faith who, for a long time, functioned as the catalyst in terms of research and progress, but at all times with the starting point of a created order. This is something that in the West slowly disappeared into the background.

This point brings me, from the foundational Islamic contribution to liberalism, to conservatism. In Chapter 2, I cited Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah who spoke of a horizontal universe, a worldview in which matters are explained solely by comparing them to those that appear to be

similar to the object of research. In such a reality there is no purpose, there are no absolutes. Everything is subjective and there exists no absolute Truth. Within it, any metaphysical expression is irrelevant, absurd even. This is the worldview of the postmodern West. I call it macro-nihilism. Opposite to that, he places the earlier mentioned vertical universe. Within this framework, one also looks 'upwards' to the philosophical principles and fundamental points of departure. By inserting the vertical aspect, a proverbial tent arises, a building structure with a benchmark and a definitive reality. Human perception of reality, by way of previously mentioned 'first principles', points to that one Reality, God.

This is the worldview of the theist, and this worldview being collectively 'lived' can mostly be found with Islam. This belief in a determining final entity is also consequential for how mankind and the community are viewed. This is a view in which morality, a free sense of community, one's own responsibility and the immaterial are central. After all, there exists a fixed, given order and the conviction that one is held accountable after this life. Morally speaking, this presumes not a large government that governs the very details of life, but most of all people who are willing to first search within themselves for improvement. After all, evil is essentially not within systems, bad neighbourhoods or capitalism, for example, but relates to the instincts (vices) one is born with. Civilising is therefore a matter of the heart. It is the urge to give in to temptations, which have to be repeatedly overcome on a personal level. The guidelines and traditions rooted in religion, but also in community, form the basis for this.

In an exceptional dialogue between British conservative Sir Roger Scruton and Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, the kinship between traditional Islam and conservatism (in line with Edmund Burke) becomes clear. What affected me in my research in this regard was the analysis that

both visions carried within them a theoretical aversion to 'modern blueprint ideologists' who have immersed themselves in the concept of the malleability of society and the postmodern notion that Truth does not exist.

Is Islam an ideology?

A great misunderstanding that relates to what I have described above is the notion that Islam *itself* is an ideology. As a longstanding believer in and proclaimer of that idea, I know that the Islam-critical side considers the practice of Islam by organisations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda to be truly Islam. According to this reasoning, Islam is not a religion, but rather a violent political ideology aimed at establishing a worldwide Caliphate, a global Islamic state. Any terrorist attack or threat by an extremist Muslim is considered an affirmation of this conviction. A comparison with fascism and communism is also often made. However, in subscribing to this notion one *first of all* has to bypass the fact that ideologies such as fascism and communism are not worldviews that have formed complete civilisations for nearly a millennium and a half. The few decades that these ideologies have been (historically) relevant are negligible in comparison. Furthermore, the central tenets of Islam are the absolute belief in God, a Holy Book, angels, heaven *and* hell. These are all typical characteristics of a religion and clearly *absent* within fascism and communism.

Finally, and contrary to the ideologies mentioned, Islam contains a message that is primarily directed at the heart of the individual believer and in which not man but God is central. Of course, these things are well known. However, they are considered secondary and subordinate to the alleged aim of establishing a global Islamic state. Nonetheless, the basis for this notion of Islam as an ideology (and this is the *second*

point) is—besides being weak—a relatively recent phenomenon. Critics are infatuated with the name of the late Islamic philosopher and prominent Pakistani politician Mawdudi, who passed away in 1979, in order to prove that Islam most certainly is an ideology and not a religion. After all, Mawdudi was one of the first to proclaim the idea of a modern state (as we generally understand it to be since the peace of Westphalia in 1648) on an Islamic basis.

According to Mawdudi, an Islamic state—in the modern understanding of the word—is a requirement, because it is the only way to enforce the *shari'a*. In this regard, there is frequent reference to his statements concerning enforcing the prayer by law: "Today people prefer the principle of freedom of religion over the commands of God. To be able to fully apply a prayer obligation, therefore, a state apparatus is required" (Mawdudi, 1963). Mawdudi's ideas have been and continue to be prominent amongst certain groups. They also formed a source of inspiration for Shaykh 'Abdullah 'Azzam, who in turn influenced Osama bin Laden. However, these groups are part of a current that—as I have outlined in the previous chapter—is far from representative of Islam.

According to Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, the notion that one could enforce 'faith' or force someone 'to be a good Muslim through an Islamic state apparatus cannot be called Islamic. He even terms it an absurd idea that goes against the Quran and the example set by Muhammad. He says: "(Such a state) never existed and it will never exist. If you think religion can be legislated by a government you are completely deluded." He then refers to the Quran (verse 10:99): "And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed—all of them entirely. Then, would you compel the people in order that they become believers?"

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Shaykh Hamza Yusuf thus states that one cannot enforce religion, and that Islam is an internal mechanism that is primarily concerned with the deeds and intentions of the heart. He also points out that there is a reason why the four historic Imams of the leading *madhhabs* (Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi'i and Ahmad bin Hanbal) never became politically active. According to Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, within the Islamic world the state merely served to facilitate affairs such as security, care for the poor, a fair justice system and a civil service apparatus free of corruption. To involve oneself in politics or even in the justice system were (religiously speaking) risky ventures which were avoided as much as possible. According to a tradition, two out of every three judges are destined for hell (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, no. 3573). Shaykh Hamza Yusuf continues:

> Abu Hanifa refused to enter into politics and was imprisoned for it. (As for) Imam Malik—if you read the entire *Mudawwana*, it does not have one political statement in it. …He did not hold any political positions, all he was doing was teaching the *shari'a*. If you want to learn it and apply it, welcome! If not, good luck in the Hereafter.

> …That is the way the religion has to be, it has to be free of politics. Once the scholar becomes engaged in the political process he is corrupted by it, because that is the nature of the world (author: see Iran, for example). It is a corrupting element, and so you do not want religion to be tainted by the temporal; you always want religion to have that non-temporal quality to it… Many Muslim thinkers were intensely interested in establishing social harmony and equilibrium on the basis of *shari'a*, but they do not see this as something that should or could be instituted from above.

Contrary to historical practice, Mawdudi *did* have the idea of working from the top down. Despite his opposition to Western influences, he had adopted a Western approach to politics through his view of the functioning of a state. According to politics professor Vali Nasr, in his work 'Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism' (1996), with this came a break with the past, to the way of thinking about religion and politics as well as, in his case, Islam as an ideology.

A new perspective

With this brief consideration of Islam in relation to Western liberalism, conservatism and the notion of Islam as an ideology, the last—and in this case, secondary—matters that I encountered in my personal quest have been discussed. A stocktaking of my findings can now be drawn up.

As has already been stated at the beginning of this chapter, this has been a structural quest, which ran parallel to the eroding of my faith in a fundamental part of Christian dogmatism and which had already begun in my late teens. Belief and interest in God and religion in general remained. It would even lead me to pursue a degree in Religious Studies by the end of 2000. Bizarrely enough, this study commenced on September 11, 2001. After this disturbing day, during the period of my studies—and as we all know, after it as well—unfortunately many other disturbing days of violence followed. There was the terrorist attack on the train station in Madrid, the school in Beslan, the murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam and the bomb explosions on the subway in London. The excessive violence during this period became a great influence on my views of Islam. Furthermore, I mentioned in the introduction the aspect of 'whitewashing', the limited Islamic

intellectual framework in the Netherlands and the enormous amount of Wahhabi propaganda—which one quickly comes across as a seeker—as factors that determined the development of how I viewed Islam.

My continental reformed Protestant upbringing and this denomination's traditional view of other religions, too, have absolutely played a role. Searching for organisations and individuals who shared this concern about Islam, eventually brought me to the Party for Freedom. After having been very active for several years as a parliamentary policy officer, a member of the provincial council and a member of parliament, I left the party in the spring of 2014. In the subsequent period, I had (politically) more room to focus on my long-standing wish: to write a book about the darker sides of Islam. As can be seen by the work at hand, this did not exactly go as planned.

As I was reading and analysing numerous works and articles for my book, I was constantly confronted with information that was sometimes diametrically opposed to what I thought I 'knew'. With regard to the topics I intended to highlight and the darker sides of the faith, I found so much data and so many facts that did not correspond with the critical approach of my book, that I decided to reconsider it in its entirety. I eventually concluded that the book had to become a reflection of that which it in fact was: my quest to find God.

Due to the initial approach in the book, my affinity with and conviction *of* monotheism *and* the fact that Islam, besides Christianity, is the only religion in which Jesus is given a special status as an inspired person and messenger of God, my search was quickly directed towards Islam in particular. Due to the absence of those Christian dogmas that I considered problematic, the Islamic concept of God has never been very distant. Nevertheless, this did not negate the many questions I still had: whether God and Allah are the same, but also about the attributes

of God as described in the Quran, and whether the message of the Quran was indeed as loveless as I thought it was. The answers I found completely removed the reservations that I had.

I then focussed on the person of Muhammad, who had been literally reviled in the West and who had rarely been positively appreciated throughout history. However, a contextual interpretation of his words and deeds portrays a picture that is diametrically opposed to the often cultivated notion of Muhammad as a villain. On the contrary, Muhammad was an example. He was an example who operated in a time and within a culture in which barbarism was in its heyday. He brought a forgotten and desolate people of the desert a foundation (Islam) that eventually lead to complete civilisations, which for centuries partially carried human progress. This foundation has not changed; however, some of its followers unfortunately have. Furthermore, I analysed several topics that had caused, on my part, great resentment against Islam: from 'terrorism' and 'violence against women' to 'apostasy' and 'hatred of Jews'. I concluded that such an interpretation of the Quran and Hadith, which is lived by Islamic extremists and propagated by Islam-critics, has historically little to do with Islam and is generally stripped of any context.

I eventually reached the point at which I had to decide what to do with my findings. In terms of content, I no longer had any objections against the message that there is only one God, Who in Arabic is called Allah. In my opinion, that message is clear and fills the gaps that I experienced within Christianity. As for Muhammad, to me the words of the renowned Catholic theologian (and former priest) Hans Küng are more than applicable: "I am convinced that (...) in the light of Muhammad's place in world history, we must correct our attitude toward Islam. We must affirm that he acted as a Prophet..."

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I would like to conclude my personal quest with the following addition to this observation by Küng: Muhammad indeed acted as a Prophet, because he *is* a Prophet.

Epilogue

In this epilogue, I would like to briefly mention the more personal and social aspects in relation to my decision. As I described earlier, there was no sudden conversion in my case. It has been a very gradual process, and looking back at it in its entirety, this quest may have begun during my late teens. It was still a very basic quest. A search for answers that, as time passed, I found increasingly insufficiently in Christianity.

The general interest in religion, likely partially because of my upbringing and my 'Christian restlessness', has always been present. My awareness of Islam—as an 'alternative' worldview and unrelated to the information from within the continental reformed Protestant denomination—began when I read the, at the time, controversial book 'The Downfall of the Netherlands, Country of Naïve Fools'. It must have been somewhere in the early 1990s—I was around fourteen years old at the time—that I found a copy of this on the 'book table' at a friend's house. The book discussed the growing influence of Islam and the negative consequences of this for the freedom in our country. This work impressed me. The eccentric (and convicted) person behind the pseudonym 'Mohammed Rasoel' I would once meet later, as a representative of the Party for Freedom.

The focus on and remaining interest in Islam, however, came with the choice to pursue a degree in Religious Studies. The combination of this study with the intense societal developments—as I have described in the introduction—is what sparked my exceptional interest (in a negative sense) in this religion. This has also not gone unnoticed in my direct surroundings throughout the years. My joining as a member of parliament for the Party for Freedom was of course the most explicit expression of this.

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Surroundings

Even though my family and friends expressed pride in me joining the parliament, not everyone was very enthusiastic about the party I had joined. Some preferred the 'smaller-right' as the conservative Christian parties used to be called. Nevertheless, this did not negate the fact that my critical view of Islam was understood, especially when the terrorist attacks intensified and became more frequent, and with the murder of Theo van Gogh, reached closer to home.

That I, of all people—especially in these times of terror (and secularisation)—have gradually revised my views of Islam in the last couple of years led to many discussions and, most of all, arguments. While people more often started to say that they had now come to realise that I was right in my views of Islam, I increasingly began to oppose this very critical assessment of the (historical) religion. Those further away from me, such as former colleagues, acquaintances and other interested parties, will only find out about my changed views and everything related to it through this book. This will probably lead to somewhat more of a dismay than with my relatives, since I have involved friends and family while writing this book and invited them to read along.

This 'early stage' may have tempered the surprise element of the eventual step that I took. Nevertheless, the astonishment was still there and the reactions have been diverse. From "I saw it coming", "No way?", "From one extreme to the other?" to "Nice to see that you have found your rest", "Interesting" and "Amazing, in all of its aspects." One friend expressed his feelings in the following way: "Rationally, I understand it. Emotionally, it is like going from Real to Barcelona… it is just not done."

My relatives have responded in different ways to the result of my quest, and that is understandable. Even I have taken quite some time to accept my own conclusion.

The first time I seriously realised that no longer rejecting Muhammad as a Prophet—combined with my changing views of Christian dogmatism—in fact meant that I could become a Muslim, was not by definition a 'eureka moment'. It was, above all, alienating. Sitting at the dinner table (late at night), surrounded by various books about the life of Muhammad, while looking at the Bible on the bookshelf; many things went through my mind. Is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob the same God as the God of the descendants of Ismael? Do I consider myself a Muslim? If Islam, at its core, proclaims a message of love, rationality and unity, why do certain Muslims react so hysterically to criticism and accusations?

Eventually, slowly and in conjunction, I was able to answer these questions sufficiently for myself, and I have tried to include the answers in this book. The question of how I look back at my very Islam-critical appearances (beyond mere criticism of Islamic extremism) in previous years naturally also comes up. I believe that what one goes through in one's life is an opportunity to learn and develop. Without having taken the path that I took, I would not be where I am today. This is why I do not regret this path, for myself. I do regret that during this process I have not always done justice to people, and that sometimes the nuance was nowhere to be found.

The testimony of faith

With the idea in mind that the one God Whom Moses and Jesus, amongst others, spoke about is the same as the God that we read about in the Quran, and that Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him

peace, without any doubt fits the line of Prophets from the Bible, I decided to pronounce the testimony of faith. This took place after an excellent dinner in a cosy, homely setting with a small group of people. After pronouncing the *shahada*, it did not rain gold and I did not see the stars sparkle more than usual. However, I did notice a certain personal delight and rest. The reactions of some Muslims that I knew were kind, sincere, warm and accompanied by many questions about 'how and why'. Besides the more theoretical side, it was the simplicity of the basic belief—with all the complexities that its details has—and the ritualization of the sacred that were aspects of Islam which enormously attracted me on an emotional level as well.

In order to develop my personal faith further, structural study and 'practice' are necessary components. Praying, religious customs and holidays are things that—as I have been advised and as is in accordance with the historical introduction of Islam—I will internalise in phases. It will not be characterised as a radical change and this is the case for me as a person as well. I have taken a fundamental step that has altered my perception of God. However, this does not mean that I have completely become a different person. My family is still my family, who I love dearly, more and more every day. My interests in religion, (classical-liberal and conservative) politics and sports have remained. My preference for Indian cuisine has not disappeared, I still drink far too much diet coke and I am not suddenly walking around with a turban.

As I have mentioned several times in this book, this quest contains a strong rational component. Nevertheless, the heart and its influence on reason cannot be underestimated. That is why I would like to conclude this epilogue with the words of Leopold Weiss, also known as Muhammad Asad ('The Road to Mecca'), with regard to the relationship between reason and the heart:

We allow ourselves to be blown by the winds because we do know what we want: our hearts know it, even if our thoughts are sometimes slow to follow—but in the end they do catch up with our hearts and then we think we have made a decision.

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In order to develop my personal faith further, structural study and 'practice' are necessary components. Praying, religious customs and holidays are things that—as I have been advised and as is in accordance with the historical introduction of Islam—I will internalise in phases. It will not be characterised as a radical change and this is the case for me as a person as well. I have taken a fundamental step that has altered my perception of God. However, this does not mean that I have completely become a different person. My family is still my family, who I love dearly, more and more every day. My interests in religion, (classical-liberal and conservative) politics and sports have remained. My preference for Indian cuisine has not disappeared, I still drink far too much diet coke and I am not suddenly walking around with a turban.

As I have mentioned several times in this book, this quest contains a strong rational component. Nevertheless, the heart and its influence on reason cannot be underestimated. That is why I would like to conclude this epilogue with the words of Leopold Weiss, also known as Muhammad Asad ('The Road to Mecca'), with regard to the relationship between reason and the heart:

We allow ourselves to be blown by the winds because we do know what we want: our hearts know it, even if our thoughts are sometimes slow to follow—but in the end they do catch up with our hearts and then we think we have made a decision.

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Glossary

1 and 2 Timothy: Biblical books from the New Testament

1 Chronicles: a Biblical book from the Old Testament

1 Peter: a Biblical book from the New Testament

1 Samuel: a Biblical book from the Old Testament

1492: year of the Reconquista (the Spaniards banished Muslims and Jews after reconquering the country)

Acts of the Apostles: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Ascension: the heavenly ascension of Jesus

Agnostic: someone who is of the opinion that there is insufficient ground to make any statements regarding the existence of God.

Antichrist: Evil in the form of a human (this person appears at the End of Times)

Apocalypse: the end of the world (as we know it)

Atheist: someone who denies the existence of God

Benedictines: a Catholic monastic order

Byzantine Empire: the Eastern Roman Empire (capital Constantinople)

Caliph: literally 'vicegerent'. The ruler at the head of the Caliphate

Caliphate: the territory that is governed by a Caliph and in accordance with Islamic law

Canonical: included in the list of religious books accepted as genuine (canon)

Continental reformed: a denomination within Protestant Christianity

Dajjal: the Antichrist in Islam

Denomination: a current within a religion

Deuteronomy: a Biblical book from the Old Testament

Dogma: an undisputed doctrine

Ephesians: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Epistemology: theory of knowledge

Ezekiel: a Biblical book from the Old Testament

Fatimids: an Isma'ili Shi'a ruling dynasty

Fitna: strife, test, temptation

Genesis: a Biblical book from the Old Testament

Gethsemane: a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem where, according to Christianity, Jesus prayed before his crucifixion

Gospel: literally 'good news'. The teachings of Jesus Christ

Gospel of Luke: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Gospel of Mark: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Gospel of Matthew: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Gospel of John: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Hadith: traditions that contain the sayings, physical descriptions, deeds and implicit approvals of Muhammad

Hebrews: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Hellenism: the ancient Greek civilizations

Holocaust: the genocide of Jews during World War II

Hosea: a Biblical book from the Old Testament

Incarnation: God in the flesh (Jesus as a human manifestation of God)

Isnad: the chain of narration in which the names of the oral narrators of Hadith are mentioned

James: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Jihad: literally this means 'to strive'. Generally speaking, the internal jihad (against temptations) is differentiated from the external jihad (against an enemy)

Jude: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Leviticus: a Biblical book from the Old Testament

Liberation theology: a theology originating in the sixties that considered sin predominantly within the framework of social injustice (strongly related to Marxist resistance movements in South America)

New Testament: the second part of the Christian Bible, in which primarily the life of Jesus and what took place after his heavenly ascent are described

Numbers: a Biblical book from the Old Testament

Old Testament: the first part of the Christian Bible (and synonymous with the Tanakh), in which primarily the history of the people of Israel is described

Orthodox: literally 'the correct doctrine'. In practice, a more conservative approach to faith

Ottoman Empire: an Islamic Empire that existed from 1299 to 1922). Also the last Caliphate

Philippians: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Polytheists: those who believe in multiple gods

Postmodernism: a philosophical current according to which there no longer exists any certainty with regard to the Truth

Profane: worldly, of this world

Protestant: a Christian who belongs to one of the Churches that originated during the Reformation

Reformation: a period (at the beginning of the sixteenth century) of reform within Western Christianity, initiated by Martin Luther. His criticism of the Catholic Church led to a schism (split) and a new denomination: Protestantism

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Romans: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Second Vatican Council: a great meeting of the Roman Catholic Church (from 1962 to 1965) in which 'modernisation' was the primary focus

Sodom and Gomorra: two cities near the Dead Sea that are mentioned in the Old Testament. The inhabitants of these cities were evil to such an extent that God decided to destroy these cities

Soteriology: the doctrine of salvation

Sunna: the way in which the Prophet Muhammad acted and spoke (setting the example to be followed by Muslims)

Sura: a chapter of the Quran

Tafsir: Quranic exegesis (interpretation of the Quran)

Talmud: the rabbinic commentary on the Tanakh (and the most important book within Judaism after the Tanakh)

Tanakh: the Hebrew Bible (and synonymous with the Old Testament)

The Republic: the name of the country that was largely on the territory of what is now the Netherlands between 1488 and 1795

Titus: a Biblical book from the New Testament

Torah: the first five books of the Tanakh

Tree of Life: according to the Bible, a tree placed by God in the Garden of Eden. The fruits of this tree would bring about immortality

Trinity: the triune concept of God within Christianity

Zakat: obligatory alms to be distributed primarily among the poor (one of the five pillars of Islam)

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APOSTATE

From Christianity to Islam in times of secularisation and terror

Joram van Klaveren, also called 'the crown prince of Wilders', was a famous critic of Islam. As a former member of the Dutch Parliament and a representative of the Party for Freedom, he submitted numerous bills related to Islam, such as those calling for the closing of mosques, for removing the Quran from parliament and for banning Islam from the Netherlands.

In order to reinforce these thoughts and opinions, he — as a Christian — began to write a book critical of Islam. During the process of writing, however, he found an increasing number of matters that challenged his views of Islam. In this book, Joram describes his personal and theological journey and the development he has undergone.

During this journey, questions arose such as: does God even exist? Is the God of the Quran the same as the God of the Bible? Does Islam teach people to hate disbelievers and oppress women? How did Joram's negative view of Islam develop? What emotional and social struggles did he have to face? And where has this journey eventually led him?

A must read for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

't Kennishuys   دار المــــعـــرفـــة

> 66 To admit that one has been wrong is seldom easy, but to write in careful detail about one's error, and then to document one's painful road to truth, reveals considerable strength of character, and restores one's confidence in human nature and in the prospects for change. 99

Prof. Abdal Hakim Murad

> 66 Joram's sincerity enabled him to shift his perspective, to remove the blind spot, to look at something objectively, and to really try and understand it on its own terms. This led to an extraordinary search, the result of which is the book that you are now reading. This book tells the story of an uncommon trajectory, the journey of a man from animosity to charity, from despair to hope, and from belligerence to peace. 99

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf